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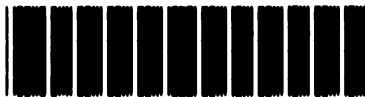
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# THE GREAT GULF FIXED.



# THE GREAT GULF FIXED.

A Novel.

BY GERALD GRANT,

AUTHOR OF

"COMING HOME TO BOOST," "OLD CROSS QUARRY," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



LONDON:

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# THE GREAT GULF FIXED.



## CHAPTER I.

It was a lovely spring day, and ~~so~~ bright, that it must have been bright everywhere. In the newly clothed woods where the birds were so fussily busy bringing out their young ones ; under the more open shadow of park trees ; on the water—wondrously bright there ; down lanes and across open fields—brightness everywhere—such brightness as made of every blade of grass, every tiny floweret, every moving leaf, and fluttering bird's wing, a wonder and a joy. Brightness in the country, of course, but in town and city too.

London looked brighter than it had done

since the commencement of the season, which was now at its height. Dazzling sunlight flooded its broad pavements, and danced about the plate-glass windows of its shops, just as if it had been hired to call attention to the gay vanities therein displayed. They could not, it is true, stand the test of its brightness half so well as the bird's wing, or the tiny floweret; nor was the light thrown on the plate-glass windows to be compared with that flung over the shining ripple of a stream. But we welcome the sunbeams wherever met, and should know how to make the most of them. Certain it is that there were hundreds—nay, thousands, perhaps—who would not have exchanged the sunlight of the streets for that of the lanes. Everything in its season, and this was the London season.

A young lady, looking from a window of the Alexandra Hotel, and one, too, who professed to be a true lover of nature, thought she had never seen sunlight more

cheery, or a sight more attractive than that on which her eye rested. What pretty carriages! What fine horses!—and she delighted in horses. What charming toilettes! What elegant women! For nearly an hour had she been standing there, and she was not yet tired of looking and admiring.

There are not many who only look to admire. With admiration will blend almost invariably a vague, unquiet feeling, which, whether it be envy, longing, or regret, will sadly interfere with the pleasure of a genuine appreciation. But the girl at the window had no such drawback to her pleasure. She admired the carriages and the horses, and the well-dressed, elegant women, but she envied nothing and nobody, being just then supremely satisfied with herself and all around her. After all, one pretty woman is worth another. It is all a matter of taste; and the girl was pretty in her own way. If the rather tall figure was too slight to suit every taste, it was finely moulded, supple, and looked well, leaning

against the dark curtain in an attitude. As to the face, the little dark face, it was every whit as bright as the sunlight outside : eyes and lips, and smiles and dimples, and the small white, regular teeth, that could never long be hidden, unless their owner was in a bad temper, all in full play, sparkling, rippling, gleaming, showing off, in fact, just as if there were some one near to admire them, which there certainly was not, the girl being quite alone—save for a huge, rather ferocious-looking dog, who lay, his nose hidden among the sweeping folds of her dress, within reach of her hand whenever she might condescend to notice him ; but just then she was too busy with her own thoughts to have even one to spare for him. Pleasant thoughts they were, or she would not have given way to them. There are those to whom it gives far more pleasure to indulge in unpleasant than in pleasant thoughts. But it was not so with the girl with the bronze brown eyes. Whenever anything in the shape of a regret or a

painful memory forced upon her its company, it was invariably received as an enemy, with frowns and sundry impatient gestures; and she had even been known, when the intruder grew importunate, to stamp her foot and cry out, a sharp cry of mingled anger and pain.

But it was long since she had been visited by any such unwelcome guest, and just then she was, as we have said, supremely satisfied with herself and all around her. With all around her, because she was in London, in the height of the season, in a fashionable hotel, and under circumstances that left her nothing to desire. With herself, because she happened to be very well dressed—better dressed, as far as cost and fashion were concerned, than she had ever been before. All about her was new, brand-new, and as fresh and bright and pretty as her own face. It was delightful, too, to think that, besides her own individual pride in herself and her appearance, there was some one else whom it highly gratified to see her

look her best, and who would think no money wasted that helped to set her off.

It was to watch for this some one that she stood at the window, and had stood there for the last hour. As soon as she got him back, she would care no more for carriages or horses, though they did amuse her very much, whilst she was alone.

Watching for the somebody so eagerly expected, her eye fell upon another somebody whom she had not at all expected, but at sight of whom she blushed very vividly, and retreated hastily from the window. "How fortunate!" was her involuntary, though only mental, exclamation. "I thought there would be no one but papa to admire my beautiful dress—and here comes Charlie!"

At the further end of the room there was a large looking-glass. In a general way she did not trouble glasses much, for in a general way she did not find herself worth looking at; but to-day she had on a new dress, made in the height of the fashion,

and it was at that, of course, and not at herself, she went to take another peep, whilst waiting for Cousin Charlie to make his appearance. When he did at last appear, she stood once more at the window, in an attitude, and was playing with an ear of the ferocious-looking dog, for whom she could always spare a thought when it was of Cousin Charlie she was thinking.

Receiving him where she stood, she was rather inclined to give herself airs. She professed unbounded surprise, declared he was the last person in the world she would have expected to see, wondered what *could* have brought him; then went on at once to talk about papa—a great deal about papa—and the places they had seen together, he and she—the opera, the theatre, the Crystal Palace; and all this without a pause, and with a lurking mischief in her eyes that was highly provoking and quite irresistible.

“And did it never occur to you that I might be coming up to town to look after



you?" broke in Lieutenant Wilkinson at last, going back, at the first opportunity, to the point from which she had started. His manner was less confident—certainly less confident and masterful than it had been down at the rectory, where he was everybody, and had been made so much of by the pretty cousin, because she had no one else to make much of *her*. But now that she had left the rectory, her father having turned up, and was in a fine London hotel, and there was every chance of her being lost to him altogether unless he made haste to secure her, he grew very much depressed and very much in earnest, and far less confident than when nothing had seemed to keep them apart but her wilful caprice and his own very natural reluctance to bestow lightly upon any one so choice a specimen of manhood as himself.

"Come up to London to look after me! How kind! No, that never occurred to me. Papa will be so glad to see you."

"And you, Rachel, are you glad? I

would rather you would answer for yourself."

"I—oh, I am glad, of course; but I couldn't put myself before papa, you know."

She was not presuming upon the change in her fortunes, but a little, perhaps, upon the change in her personal appearance, since she and Charlie had last been together. She had on a prettier and more fashionable dress than he had ever seen her in. She was looking her best, her very best—that she knew; and he was admiring her—that she also knew, well enough; and the knowledge made her laugh and feel very much inclined to be saucy.

"Do you know, Rachel," with a sentimental air, "that in a month or so I shall have to be off again to India?"

"Will you? [How dreadful! But as you are all right now, you could have no excuse for staying away."

He bit his lip and looked at her reproachfully. "You once said, and not so long ago, that you could not bear the idea of my

going away; that you would feel so dull without me."

"And so I should," heartily. "You can't think how dull it sometimes was—the schoolroom and the linen-press, and no one to walk or ride with. I *should* have found it dull," with feeling. Then, catching his eye, she laughed again—she couldn't help it; not for the life of her could she have felt sentimental at that moment, or looked it either.

"India is a long way off."

"Not so very long," encouragingly. "You see papa has got back, though I'm sure I thought he never would. Nothing is really far now. And then, too, if you have still a month or so before you start, why should you begin to feel sorry now?"

There is nothing so difficult as to play the sentimental long, single-handed. Lieutenant Wilkinson felt this, and heartily wished that the girl Rachel would show her smiles and dimples less, and look less confoundedly pretty and saucy, that he might

have a fair chance of being heard. How could he act the sentimental lover, and she laughing all the time? It was not giving a fellow the ghost of a chance.

“And was it really to see me that you came all the way up to London? What did aunt say to that?”

“She told me you were off to Paris some day next week; so I thought that if I was to see you again, no time was to be lost.”

His mother had told him something else besides; that if he wanted to marry the girl—and he might do worse—he would be a fool to let her go without an explanation. Some months before, an explanation had been the very thing she had most dreaded and tried to ward off; but what important changes may not at times be effected in the course of months! It was Mrs. Wilkinson who had packed his portmanteau, and bidden him God-speed; assuring him, by way of encouragement, that he had but to speak; that the girl was dying to get him,

or had been up to the time of her leaving the rectory, and he had but to speak to be accepted. "But she wouldn't let him speak, confound her! She did nothing but laugh; and if he made a fool of himself, she'd laugh at him." He was beginning to feel aggrieved and sulky.

"Yes, papa has to go to Paris on business, and he has promised never again to leave me behind if it can be possibly avoided."

The laugh vanished, the lids quivered a little, and drooped over the brown eyes, which sank slowly to the ground. How much more she cared for the stern, middle-aged man of business, who had been content to be parted from her for years, than for the handsome, dashing young officer, who could be such an ardent lover!

The laugh gone, the eyes withdrawn, the bold hero of the Ashantee was himself again.

"When do you expect uncle home?"

She started, and looked up, but not at him, out at the window eagerly. "Oh, any moment. I expected him home before now. I have been watching for him for the last hour."

"It was to see him, as well as you, that I came up to town."

She gave him an approving little nod; but she was still looking out at the window.

"Do you remember what I said to you that last walk we took together in—in the autumn?"

"Oh, don't I!" with energy, "and the dreadful cold I got; and how you went off to Brighton when I wanted you most to amuse me, because you found me so ugly and cross and dull."

It was true that the rain that had so inopportunately cut short his declaration, and given Rachel the cold that had greatly interfered with her good looks, and made her "cross and dull," had considerably damped his ardour, and induced him to listen to

maternal advice, and run down to Brighton. And he was there still, enjoying the sea breezes, and the devoted attentions of some half a score of pretty girls of his acquaintance, when news had come of Mr. Raye's unexpected arrival in England, and of a telegram that had summoned Rachel to London in all haste to meet him. The cousins had met since then, of course, and compliments had been paid, and tender hints given and laughingly received, but he had never had a chance of renewing his offer. The fact was, that with all his war-like qualities, and fine soldierly airs, he was afraid of the girl, and one flash from the great brown eyes would give him a queerer feeling about the heart than the fire of a thousand cannons could have done. He now, however, felt all the desperation of one leading a forlorn hope. He would not lose an opportunity that might never occur again—for when the uncle was by, there was no getting a word, or even look, from her; so with a mighty effort, and fierce tug at

his moustache, he opened fire, by coming to the point.

“ May I tell uncle what I told you that day ? ”

The flash came, but he kept his ground. If he gave way at the first shock he was lost. Once more he applied for courage to his moustache, and gallantly returned to the charge. “ Might he speak to her father that evening ? ”

She did not answer him at once ; she looked at him fixedly, and in silence, debating in her own mind whether she should only laugh, or get into a passion. Could he really mean to come between her and the father who had only just returned to her, and to whom she had quite, quite made up her mind to devote her life ? As if she could ever again think of marrying now that she had him ! Had any one but Charlie dared propose such a thing, she would certainly have got into a passion ; but he was her cousin, and had proposed to her once before, which gave him a sort of



right to propose again; and so, though she would never marry him or any one else, now papa had come back, she would rather not quarrel with him if she could help it. It being Cousin Charlie, and such a very old friend, she could not look upon a proposal from him as a really serious affair; but she was anxious to spare his feelings, and say something very nice and kind that—would settle the matter before papa arrived.

Turning from him to the window once more, she caught sight of a tall, broad figure, crossing the road as coolly unconscious of, or indifferent to, the stream of carriages, as if the London road were a desert path, and he the sole passer by.

“There he is! There’s papa!” she cried excitedly. Then turning on her unfortunate companion, the little dark face all flushed and eager, and wearing the determined look it could at times assume, “And mind, you’re not to say a word to him about anything; not a word, or I’ll never speak to you again—never. It was very good of you

to wish to marry me ; but I've quite made up my mind, now that he's come back, never to marry, but to remain an old maid, and live with him all my life."

## CHAPTER II.

IT was nearly a year since Treherne had changed masters, and as yet it seemed none the worse for the change. People are apt to think that the world, or at least that part of it to which they belong, could not get on without them; but this, like most other things in life, is a mistake. However useful you may have been in your generation, however worthy of regret, things do get on without you, and not so very badly either. It's a humiliating fact, but it is a fact, and should be accepted as such.

The late squire, as master of Treherne, had done his duty by the estate and all those upon it—of that there could be no doubt. He had planted, dug, drained, and

enriched the soil. He had built model cottages and model farms, and quite a model village round about the Works. Under him the property had increased both in value and importance; and there is no knowing what else he might have done, bringing all his sound practical knowledge to bear upon his hobby. But the place had passed into other hands, and nothing and nobody seemed any the worse for the change.

Mr. Treherne had returned from abroad, and had at once taken his rightful place, both at home and in the county. That it was his rightful place no one could doubt who saw him in it. Even Carlton Rickharts himself felt a sort of involuntary admiration at their first interview after his return, and noticed in the squire what had never struck him in the schoolmaster, perhaps because he now for the first time looked at him with interest and sympathy. Hitherto the only feeling that had bound the one man to the other had been a certain

generous, half contemptuous pity—pity for his lameness, his stammering speech, the shy awkwardness and nervous, shrinking manner, in which only the meek-browed little rectory governess, who had herself suffered, had from the first recognized the sensitive pride of an over-refined nature, but which coarser, ruder natures, and even the schoolmaster himself in the darkest hour of his shame and humiliation, had mistaken for cowardice. Put a man in a false position and he loses his individuality, he ceases to be himself. John Treherne had never hitherto been in any position but a false one, though no one, excepting Agatha, had found it out until now. Carlton Rickharts had honestly believed that the poor-spirited schoolmaster, bullied, badgered, beset on all sides, and quite powerless against the attacks of a handful of school-boys and ignorant rustics, would make but a poor-spirited squire. John Rawdon was not John Treherne, however; and this he began dimly to realize as he now looked at

the fair, proud face, with its high, characteristic features and pale, thoughtful brow. He realized it all the more after an hour's conversation, which left him fairly puzzled at his varied knowledge, and the masterly way in which he handled every subject that was brought forward. Whether the extensive theoretical knowledge would have equally extensive practical results, remained to be proved. Anyhow, it was there, and left Carlton Rickharts lost in wonder. "Why, the fellow knows twice as much as I do. Beats me hollow at a sitting. I wonder where he got it all. From the musty old books with which I so liberally provided him, or from the successive generations of landowners? Anyhow, he's quite competent to manage his own affairs."

That being the case, he washed his hands of them. But as he had to work, not as heretofore as an amateur for the mere pleasure of the thing, but as those must work who have their bread to earn and a name and fortune to make, he applied for

the situation of manager of the Iron Works, which had become vacant, and went to live in one of the model cottages he had himself built.

“What do you mean by throwing yourself away like that?” Colonel Beverley had cried indignantly, having found out his old friend and rival in his model cottage, and nearly shaken off his hand by way of preface. He was, perhaps, the only one in the county who had kept up with the man after his fall. Squire Treherne was everything to them, Mr. Rickharts nothing. “A man like you, with your talents, your position——”

Mr. Rickharts smiled.

“You should have made the government do something for you. With the interest you had——”

“As a Treherne?”

“Eh!” The colonel started, and stared, and gave a dissatisfied grunt. “Well, of course, we shouldn’t expect them to do anything out of the way; but when they have

so many good appointments in their gift, and so few of the right sort to put into them——”

“What a pity that you are not the government, colonel.”

“Nonsense!” testily. “But they want workers, as well as fine gentlemen, I suppose. Why shouldn’t a Rickharts serve them just as well as a Treherne? I don’t see it—— But, by Jove!” as if struck by a new and startling idea, “I shouldn’t wonder if you had never even applied to them!”

No, he certainly had not applied to them, not seeing what right he had to do so. Had he been a Treherne, though a beggared one, influential relations and friends—and he had enough of them at one time—might have been expected to do something for the honour of the name. But, being Carlton Rickharts, the gamekeeper’s son, he did not see that he had any claim whatever upon them; add to this, that, having so long been master, it might not perhaps come



to him so readily and naturally to turn petitioner.

"I thought as much," growled the colonel with growing irritation. "Not even applied to them! And then you take to this sort of work," with an indignant jerk of his head in the direction of the big, ugly building that formed the only view from the model cottage. "Why, there isn't a fellow about the place wouldn't do for that just as well as you."

"I have quite come to the same conclusion."

"That the place is unfit for you?"

"That it would get on just as well without me; that, or any other place I might choose to fill. It's a mistake to think otherwise; it is the law of nature, which knows full well how to fill up its empty spaces. Were we individually wanted, we should be privileged to live longer. One lifetime has never proved sufficient for the proper working out of an idea. It is only successive generations, the one filling up the place of

the other, that can bring anything to perfection. The Works would do very well without me; so will the government, depend upon that, colonel."

He would not have spoken so six months before. But we learn from experience.

"To think of a fellow throwing himself away like that," grumbled on the colonel, as indignant as if he had himself received some personal injury. He was too indignant, indeed, to make himself comfortable, or even to take a seat in the model cottage, and did his best to render himself and his visit disagreeable, though he had come with very different and more generous intentions.

Mr. Rickharts smiled at his vehemence; and when he turned to go, accompanied him nearly all the way home.

"I should have thought you would have had enough of me and of my crabbedness." This the colonel said when he had exhausted himself in invectives against the Works, the manager, and the party to which he belonged; and was half inclined to feel

ashamed of himself. But he couldn't resist one last thrust. "That's what comes of being a Radical."

Mr. Rickharts was too much amused not to protest.

"Come, colonel, now that my politics can't in any way interfere with you, you might as well let them rest. After all, it's quite nonsense, you know—Conservatism, Liberalism. I don't believe in them. They are just suggestive terms, and, as such, will always be popular; but as actual living principles, they have ceased to exist—for me, at least."

"Eh!" Again the colonel started and stared. It was now his companion's turn to have his say out and make himself disagreeable.

"Well, if it means anything at all, it is simply this, that Carlton Treherne was always a Conservative, and Colonel Beverley a Liberal."

"I a—a Liberal!"

In his amazement he stopped short, and

tried to look his companion in the face, which was impracticable rather, as he had walked quietly on, calmly indifferent as to whether the elderly gentleman at his side kept up with his pace or argument.

“More so than I was six months ago, at any rate, though I believed in myself, and others believed in me. I thought I understood the people among whom I lived, and whose interests I was to represent—their wants, their requirements, as well as they did themselves, or better. I quite resented any attempt on their part to think for themselves, when they had me to think for them. It came quite naturally to me to patronise them; and this, not because I was as one of them, or ever could be, but because, as a Treherne, I was their natural patron and protector. I should have been their member, and spoken up for them and made, or fancied I made, their interests mine, because I was their feudal lord. If now I were to go in as one of them——”

“All right, my dear fellow,” here

gasped the poor colonel, who was fairly exhausted, physically as well as mentally. "You always did beat me at an argument. I never had a chance against you; no fellow could have. That's why you should have been in the House," with a regretful sigh at the waste of so much argumentative talent. "And, by George, I'd rather listen to you there than here. I might manage to keep up with you there, if seated, which I —can't here," puffing and panting helplessly.

"With my opinions, do you mean, or my walk?"

"Your opinions!" pettishly; "as if I should ever pretend to keep pace with them. Why, you're a century in advance of me at least. But you might have more consideration for my age and prospects, than to rob me of what little wind I may have left for parliamentary purposes, by walking at the rate of eight miles an hour."

Carlton Rickharts, still amused, slackened speed, and tried to turn the conversation;

but the M.P., breathless, but undaunted still, returned with dogged persistence to the original grievance, again expressing his surprise and indignation. "What a fine, generous old fellow it is!" was his companion's mental exclamation. Had he been a Frenchman he would have known how to express his admiration in becoming terms; in all probability he would, in his enthusiasm, have embraced the colonel on the spot. As it was, however, being only an Englishman, he showed his feelings in a different way, or rather, did not show them, except by shrugging his shoulders, and coolly observing that Colonel Beverley was no more worthy to be Conservative member for the county than he, Carlton Rickharts, and he ought to be ashamed of himself. As he did not quite see this, he proceeded forthwith, as a proof of friendship, no doubt, to convince him of the fact.

"Has it not always been a pet theory of yours that every man should keep through life in the position in which he was born?"

—and therefore you railed at all our poor efforts to advance the march of civilization—education, reading-rooms, debating-halls. Trade, commerce, money, you abused them all in turn, because they made us poor fellows think too much of ourselves, and were supposed to give us a lift——”

“*You*,” growled the colonel, “you know I never meant that a man of education——”

“Ha, ha!” laughed his tormentor, taking a mean advantage of the elderly gentleman’s discomfiture. “You have quite come round to our way of thinking. You argue, with us, that birth is nothing, and education everything; that I, or any other son of a mechanic, who might have sufficient knowledge and self-esteem, would be quite justified in forcing himself into a position to which he was not born.”

“Whoever said such a thing?” indignantly. “I was talking of you, and the exceptional circumstances——”

“That’s just it, colonel. Circumstances are everything; they make the man, nine-

teen times out of twenty. But I'm inclined to think you were right, after all. Be true to your position, and rise with it; but don't try to jump violently out of it, like a fish out of water, because you fancy it must be a finer thing to run or fly, than swim."

"Fish out of water!" snapped up the colonel, who was being irritated beyond all bearing. "Do you mean to tell me that you would not feel ten times more at home in a good government appointment that might lead to political distinction, than in that iron business?"

"But the good government appointment has to be got, and through interest; and, unfortunately, colonel, I was myself too long a Treherne not to know the class I should have to deal with. Political opinions are all very well, but circumstances make the man, as he actually is, not as he appears. Why did you not, when I was Squire Treherne, reproach me every time we got together, with being a Radical? And



I am now convinced that I was never anything of the kind, and no Treherne could be."

"A Treherne, likely enough; but you never were a Treherne. You despised the whole lot of them; and well you might."

"Which shows how little you know about the matter. I was just as proud of them as I could possibly be, though I abused them one and all, as you do our debating clubs, and Hyde Park meetings, and Parliamentary Reform. I was as proud of my noble ancestors as if they had been the greatest men that ever lived. I was proud of their pride, and all other family failings; of their family portraits, of their small hands and feet, and every other small peculiarity for which they were distinguished. I don't think I realized this at the time, but I know that I felt their loss more than I did any other. You see, a Rickharts can in time attain to anything—he may be a millionaire, or a Prime Minister—but however great himself, he can never

attain to ancestors, however insignificant. The loss, therefore, is irreparable."

Was the man only joking or was he in earnest? The colonel was left in doubt. The words did not tell him, or the grave, impassive face either.

## CHAPTER III.

“A TREHERNE, every inch of him; all the family virtues and failings—the former exaggerated, the latter ameliorated. Who would expect a Treherne to be interested in anything so commonplace and unsightly as our Works? Had I accepted them as a compensation for the loss of the estate, as he wished, I should have done him a great personal favour, no doubt; but it being his property, and not mine, he must be made to realize its interests as connected with his own. One thing he has already learnt—readily enough, like a true Treherne—to spend. Of this the workmen, like the rest of his dependents, are now taking advantage. But a great principle is at stake, and the

one must stand up as an example for the many. He is rich, and can afford to suffer for a principle."

All this Carlton Rickharts said to himself as he slowly paced the Treherne library, waiting for the squire.

How often had John Treherne, as the village schoolmaster, waited for him in that same room, humbly and patiently! But it was not in the nature of Carlton Rickharts to be humble and patient, and he looked neither the one nor the other when his host at last appeared, with many eager apologies for the unavoidable delay, which apologies he accepted coolly enough. He even tried to set them aside as a waste of time; but John Treherne had acquired great fluency of utterance of late, and no longer hesitated to say what he felt, and all that he felt.

"We were only saying just now, Agatha and I, how very seldom we see you——"

"I have to speak to you on a matter of business."

"Yes, yes, of course," reproachfully, "or

I should not see you here. I know how much you have to do; but we miss the visits that used to be such a comfort to the schoolmaster."

"Thank you. I was never much of a hand at visiting, I fear, and I find it more convenient dining in my own house than in another man's; it saves time. But whenever you wish to see me on business you have but to let me know. It is business that brings me here to-day," with his quiet smile, as he saw the squire's countenance fall, and caught the faint sigh of resignation he remembered so well in the father.

"Business!" and the slight figure shrank back a little, and assumed a more comfortable position in the big leathern chair. Business and Carlton Rickharts in conjunction, he knew what that meant!

It meant something serious. It was not for nothing that the manager had that deep line between the eyes, and that hollow in the cheeks. The Works had at one time been a pet hobby of his, it was now the

business of his life ; and a year of hard, anxious work will not leave a man's face as smooth as it found it.

As Carlton Treherne he had often said, " You have but to give your workmen good wages, and houses, and treat them well, to make them contented and faithful." As Carlton Rickharts he had now to learn his mistake. Led on by a few bold, unruly spirits, who insisted upon the fact of their manager being a Radical, and the squire for so many years one of them, that he would be ashamed, if not actually afraid, to refuse their exactions, they had demanded an increase of wages, clearly intimating that they were quite prepared to strike should this be refused them. Carlton Rickharts, on his side, would not for a moment have hesitated how to act ; but he had to consult the squire, who received his communication as he very well knew he would. He was not surprised, not in the least ; workmen always were getting up strikes, that he knew. He knew, too, how hard it was for the working class

to live, more especially when sickness or death visited them. He knew how hard he had found it to live with Agatha in the model school-house. "How did Mr. Rickharts propose to act?"

The answer was ready, clear and emphatic. To refuse, definitely and unconditionally, that or any other demand made in the same spirit. Then he entered more fully upon the subject, enlarging upon the importance of distinguishing motives, and refusing all demands made rather in defiance than in self-defence.

It might have gratified Colonel Beverley, as it would certainly have surprised him, to hear his Radical friend exerting all his masterly eloquence "on the right side"—he whose proudest aim had been to stand up as the friend of the people, their mouth-piece whenever their rights might be attacked. But experience will teach politicians as well as other men, and cause them at least to modify their views.

John Treherne no longer leant back in

the big leathern chair at his ease ; he had gradually raised himself, and now bent forward eager and interested.

“And you really think that it ceases to be a personal matter ; that ‘to give in to them would be to commit a grievous public wrong’? I feel that you are right. I myself have had to deal with numbers, and I know what example will do, both for good and evil,” with the shadowed smile that would always come along with the thought of that other life that had been lived and left behind. “And if they do strike?”

“Let them. I would stop work altogether and close the Works, rather than yield to an unjust demand and spread abroad the spirit of discontent. A stand should be made somewhere. To attempt it might ruin many another master ; it could not ruin you.”

“No, no, of course. I was not thinking of that, but of their wives and children, who would suffer, and who would have to be turned out.”



“ We should have the wives and children of other men to take their places. One man’s loss is another man’s gain ; in that way things become much more equalized than we in general suppose.”

There was a pause. John Treherne knew that his companion was right. He had made the welfare of the working classes the grand study of his life, and had done more for them than he himself in his ignorance could ever do ; it was in their own interest he now spoke. Yes, it clearly was his duty as master to make a stand and refuse them what they asked for. But he felt sorry for them and for the wives and children, having known them all in that other life of poverty and struggle, as their manager never could know them, not having lived among and been one of them. If he would have given them the extra and not have looked upon it as a national question, it would have saved them all a great deal. But he was right, no doubt, and must know best.

When the pause had lasted so long that

Mr. Rickharts was beginning to grow impatient, he looked up.

"I will be down at the Works to-morrow, and will speak to the men myself."

"You?"

Mr. Rickharts slightly elevated his brows, in token of surprise. About the last thing in the world he would have expected from the man before him, would have been for him to volunteer a visit to the Works and an interview with the hands under anything but favourable circumstances. He hardly approved of his interference, or his looks belied him.

"You won't mind my speaking to them, will you? You once said that every master should learn to know the men who work for him. I don't think I could have a better opportunity of knowing mine. I should be the first, I think, to let them know the decision to which we have come."

Carlton Rickharts' brows had not returned to their natural level, they were still on the ascent as their owner grew more

and more surprised. Up to within the last five minutes he would have said that, of all living men, John Treherne would be the one most ready to have an unpleasant or dangerous duty performed by deputy; and here he was, all eagerness to defy a set of rough, excited men, who more than half despised him still for his former nothingness, and would seize the first occasion to remind him of it. If he could not manage, and even shrank from facing, a handful of unruly urchins, how would he dare to face a crowd of enraged workmen? It was absurd altogether. Let him mind his own business, and stay quietly at Treherne. He looked very well there, in the library, among the musty old books, or in the picture-gallery, surrounded by his ancestors. There was no occasion for him to make himself unpopular, or place himself in a false position.

“You had better leave it to me, and let me manage it for you,” he said bluntly; and at the same time he rose to go, giving him-

self an unconscious shake, as if thereby to shake off an uncalled-for interference.

“How could you propose going down to those horrid, angry men!” Agatha said when, later on in the evening, her husband told her of the interview. “You know they always hated you, because you were so different, even when you lived among them. Mr. Rickharts is quite right; they have only done it to vex you; and you may be sure that Jim Bates is at the bottom of it all. I would have nothing to do with them!” And Mrs. Treherne’s eyes flashed, and her cheek grew very red—the fair, soft cheek that had regained all its softness and prettiness now, as was natural, she being such a happy, proud little wife. “You won’t go, will you?” she added, coaxingly. “I should be so frightened;” and stooping over his chair, she caressed and kissed him, and felt so grateful to Mr. Rickharts for having kept him from risking his precious life. For what would hers be without him? What would she care for wealth or

position; for the pretty carriages in which she delighted to drive; the pretty dresses she so delighted in wearing; the jewels that, having adorned successive generations of proud, high-born Trehermes, John's ancestors, now gleamed for her, his wife; the grand old rooms, with their quaint, stately furniture, that, in her childish light-heartedness, which had all returned to her now, she was never tired of admiring—what would she care if he were not there, the centre of it all? Was it not the thought of him that made it all appear so strangely beautiful and perfect?

It was of him only she was thinking as she stood on tiptoe behind his chair, and wound her arms about him. But he was thinking, and half sadly, of the man who had left him not many hours before. It was to spare him the odium of a step, the consequences of which must anyhow fall most heavily upon him, that he had volunteered the objectionable visit to the Works. He could not forget all he owed to the late

master of Treherne, who had for thirty years filled the position he now filled, whose place he had usurped, and whose cool independence of character, rather than pride, had hitherto prevented anything like a return, or even acknowledgment. If no one else noticed that deep line that had come with the last few months, he had, and it hurt him. From his childhood he had had a peculiar feeling, natural, perhaps, and certainly unreturned, for the companion whose glorious strength, physical as well as moral, he had half envied and wholly admired; and now when their social level was the same, in his eyes at least—for the one had risen and the other could not sink—they were as far apart as ever.

“He is no more fit to be the manager of those Works than I was to be a village school-master,” he said at last, almost bitterly.

“That’s what Colonel Beverley says. He is quite angry with him for accepting the situation, and with you for giving it.”

“He would take nothing else. It was hardly generous of him to accept no return for all he gave——”

“Only what had been rightfully yours all along.” Agatha, in her wifely devotion and feminine injustice, had been more than once inclined to resent Carlton Rickharts’ long usurpation of her husband’s lawful position, whilst he, the rightful heir, had been subjected to want, reproach, and shame.

“Hardly another man would have acted throughout as he has done. Do you know, Agatha, that if ever I have a son, my earnest prayer to God will be that he may grow up just such another, in every respect, as Carlton Rickharts.”

“Amen,” said Agatha, whose prayer, if left to herself, would have been such a different one.

## CHAPTER IV.

ON leaving Treherne House, Carlton Rickharts did not at once go home, or rather, he did not at once go back to the model cottage, which, model cottage though it was, he had not yet learnt to look upon as home. It never does to go from better to worse; the good wine should not be tasted at the first, or it will render the bad all the more unpalatable. Carlton Rickharts, having lived thirty years of his life at Treherne, found it harder than many another might have done to reconcile himself to four walls, a white ceiling, and a close view of the tall chimneys of the Works.

When Colonel Beverley, who had not the same consideration for his feelings as he



the hat, under the wide brim of which rippled and glowed a profusion of brown hair—glowed, too, a pair of brown startled eyes, and a little brown cheek, as the red blood went leaping up into it.

At first neither spoke nor moved.

Carlton Rickharts did not feel quite as he had done five minutes before, or, indeed, as he had done any time within the last two years: there was a quickening of his pulses, a sudden rush of the warm blood through them, and into his eyes came the look that had not been in them since they had last rested on that little dark, bright, wayward face.

“Rachel Raye.”

Then she laughed and held out her hand. She was quite herself, neither embarrassed nor agitated. Had she shown or felt any strong emotion she would not have looked half so pretty. A laugh became her well, it showed off her teeth and dimples, and she was blushing rosy red, which set off and lighted up the naturally sallow complexion.

When she gave him her hand, he did not at once let it go, but held it closely and half unconsciously, as he looked into her face. He did not feel sentimental, nor overcome exactly; but it did give him a queer sensation to be holding once more that small, daintily gloved hand—so daintily gloved now—and meeting the brown eyes that did not droop or quiver, but met his with more of laughing assurance than they ever had before. The fact was that Miss Rachel Raye was now a person of some importance, a fact which she perfectly well realized, whereas Mr. Rickharts was a person of no importance whatever, which made all the difference.

“Klint startled you, I am afraid?”

“Not half so much as his mistress, Miss Raye being the last person in the world I should have expected to see here.”

She laughed again, as if he had said something very amusing.

“You are staying with the Lanes?”

“Yes. Papa had to visit several places

on business, and thought I had better come down and pay Aunt Mary my long-promised visit. It is two years, you know, since I was here last."

"Two years."

He repeated the words slowly, dropped her hand, and turned from her to where, far away over the hills, the evening sunlight lay.

As soon as her hand was released, and she found herself free, she called Klint to her side, and walked on. Carlton Rickharts, his gaze still fixed on the far distance, followed her mechanically. Had her words set him thinking—and of what?

At one time, when they were so much together, she had a trick which he had been very much inclined to resent, of answering to his thoughts.

"How strange it seems, returning to a place which you find quite unchanged, when you and your circumstances are changed altogether! I think the unchangeableness of everything strikes you so much

more than it would if you and your feelings were the same."

Yes, all around them was unchanged ; the same exactly as when they had stood there together last—sunshine and shade, the park, the old house in the distance, the giant oak, with its low-lying bough, upon which the girl had swung and laughed, and so often provoked him with her careless, happy, unconventional looks and words. The objects around the same, the rest how changed to them both !

"I see that the dear old oak is still your favourite haunt. By-the-by, now I come to think of it, it was about the same time of year, on the very same spot, and in the very same attitude, that I saw you for the first time ; and then, too, it was Klint who startled you on to your feet. I hope he knew you again, and did not growl. Ah, yes, he does know you again, you see. Good Klint. Poor old fellow !"

For the huge beast had pushed his head under the man's loosely drooping hand, and

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For the huge beast had pushed his head under the man's loosely drooping hand, and



was looking up into his face with the blood-shot, sinister eyes that could be almost as eloquent as those of his mistress.

Mr. Rickharts smiled, and patted the rough head. As Carlton Treherne he had felt but little sympathy for Miss Rachel's uncouth favourite. He was uncouth and surly, and he had more than once taken her to task for showing such bad taste as to care for him. But now, when she tripped along, bright, careless, and happy, not betraying by word or look that she remembered that which the sight of her had startled him into remembering only too vividly, a sudden bond of sympathy sprang up between Miss Raye's two companions; and the once imperious lover, whose frown, in her softer, more yielding moods, had fairly awed her into submission, and whose smiles she had courted and hung upon, and basked in delightedly, receiving each separately, and as gratefully as if it had been some rare lordly gift, felt almost grateful to her ugly follower for pressing close to his side and claiming his notice.

“Are you making any long stay here?”

“I hope not—that is,” correcting herself, and laughing up in his face as easily and unconcernedly as if they had never made love to each other in that very spot through the long, bright summer months, “I hope papa won’t stay away longer than is absolutely necessary. He promised me he would not.”

“I heard of Mr. Raye’s return to England.”

“Oh yes—of course,” as if it were the most natural thing in the world that all should have heard of the great event that had so changed her life.

They had reached the stile, at the foot of which Rachel had once lain prostrate, crying out in all the recklessness of despair, “Oh, my darling!—my darling! How can I live without you?”

Bright, indifferent, smiling still, she once more held out her hand.

“I shall see you again, perhaps, before you leave Didford.”

“Aunt says you never go near them. You are too busy, I suppose, to pay idle visits. I remember you always thought them a great bore. Good-bye.”

Her voice rang out clear and sharp, for she was now on the other side of the stile. Leaning against it, he watched her out of sight. She did not once turn round; he had hardly expected her to do so, but he would have been glad if she had. He did not say to himself that he was disappointed, that he would rather have met her in some other way, or not have met her again at all; but having watched her out of sight, he walked quietly back to the model cottage, stowed away his legs as best he could under the parlour table, spread out before him a heap of papers, partly plans, partly calculations, and worked at them in right good earnest until far into the night. The deep line between his eyes and the hollow in his cheeks were more than usually apparent as the shaded light of the lamp fell upon his face.

Had the two, who were lovers through the long, bright summer days, dreamt during the first months of separation of a possible meeting in the future, would their dream have come at all near to the reality of that summer afternoon? How often, when lying awake in the little white bed at the rectory, had poor Rachel, feverish with restlessness and longing, stretched out her arms, as women will, then drawn them back passionately to her bosom, moaning out, as the old haunting vision returned, "Oh, if I could but see you once again!—feel the touch of your hand, meet the look of your eyes!—have one kiss—one word! Oh, my love!—my love!"

But he had ceased to be her love when he became the affianced husband of Miss Graham, the girl of whom she had always been so bitterly jealous. Was it that, or the fact of his having ceased to be Carlton Treherne and become plain Carlton Rickharts, that had cured her of her folly?

## CHAPTER V.

“You’LL look after him, won’t you, Rachel dear? You’ll see that he has everything comfortable? I think I’ve told you pretty well all now; but, you see, it’s the first time I’ve ever left home without him, and he’s not used to the feeling of being alone.”

“Alone! Why, he’ll have me, aunty!”

“Yes, yes, dear, to be sure; and he was always very fond of you, was Uncle Joe. And if you’ll look after him and see——”

“That he has his slippers comfortably warmed and ready to pop into the very moment he gets home.”

“Well, dear, only if he has been out in the wet, for just now the weather is so very warm——”

“All right. I’ll consult the barometer

and thermometer, and treat uncle and his slippers accordingly. To think of my having the sole responsibility of the dear old man! How dreadful! But he shan't get into mischief, if I can help it. Perhaps you would like me to see the light put out in his room at night? At any rate, he can have a bell by his bedside, and ring me up, in case anything should go wrong. His nightcap might get awry, and that would give him cold. Come, aunty, don't look so awfully concerned. He will be all right and very jolly, too, never fear."

But poor Mrs. Lane was not to be thus easily quieted. To have to take a long railway journey all alone; to have to leave poor Joe to the tender mercies of a wild, giddy-pated niece; to leave, too, her flowers and poultry-yard—all this was a very heavy trial. But she was a Christian woman was Mrs. Lane, and when summoned to the death-bed of an old cousin, whom no one looked after, for whom no one cared, and who had for years been kept alive by Joe's half-

yearly remittances, she arranged all her worldly affairs as if bound for the distant land from which there is no return; gave her last solemn instructions to Joe, Rachel, cook, Jane, the stable-boy and gardener; and early the next morning—not having slept a wink during the night, or allowed any one else to do so either—got into the pony-chaise and was driven down to the station by Uncle Joe.

When ready to start there was Rachel—not nervous and shivering, like the good aunt, but fresher and brighter far than the summer morning, which was rather a dull one—perched up on the seat behind.

“Rachel—up at this hour! Well, to be sure!” cried Mrs. Lane through her chattering teeth.

“Why, auntie, have you not left uncle in my charge, and wasn’t it my duty to see that he got safely home to breakfast and didn’t play truant on the way?”

“And without a shawl or even a warm jacket!”

Aunt Mary was herself equipped as for a North Pole expedition, her stout person literally effaced beneath the shawls, and rugs, and veils, and knitted etceteras, into which she had crept for comfort.

Of course they reached the station at least half an hour before time; and of course Uncle Joe followed closely by the Arctic-looking figure in which he alone could have recognized his wife; made a rush to the ticket-office, which would not be opened for another quarter of an hour; then to the platform to look for the train that was still miles away; then to the waiting-room to see that Rachel had been faithful to her trust and had collected together all the loose packages committed to her care.

Trains came in and trains went out, and every time the whistle sounded the Arctic figure appeared on the platform, followed by another figure and all the loose packages. The worst effect of a railway journey upon Mrs. Lane was that it made her lose all faith in her fellow creatures. She would



trust no one. The porter had said he would call her in time; but she did not trust the porter.

The ticket had been procured; the train was expected in five minutes; the Arctic figure—posted as near to the edge as her mortal dread of being drawn into the infernal machinery and crushed into a shapeless mass would allow—stood ready, trembling and almost breathless with expectation.

Rachel looked on amused, wondering how any one could make such a fuss about nothing at all. “Good, worthy old couple, how much less they had learned of life in their threescore years than she had in her twenty-two summers! What was their experience compared with hers? They were mere children to her! What did they know of life’s storms and struggles, the partings that leave behind them the bitterness of death? Now, on looking back, or rather, forward—for the past had lost for her the cruel fascination it had once possessed—it

seemed as if her life, the most important part of it, at least, had long since been lived out and left behind. So much the better—so much the better! You can only be really happy when you are free!” And as she felt the warm, young blood course through her veins, even though she had on no warm jacket or shawl, and looked up at the sun which, breaking at last through the dull morning clouds, shone out all red and glorious, as if angry at having been so long eclipsed, she smiled to herself and thought what a beautiful and pleasant thing life was if you had done with its passions and had the heart to enjoy it; and she almost pitied the harmless old couple before her for being so old and fussy and narrow-minded, with no living interests or sympathies beyond their own garden wall.

The train was up, and into it Mrs. Lane had been hoisted, with all her belongings; and she and they having been settled in as comfortably as circumstances would permit (she had the compartment to herself, and

had somehow managed to fill it), Uncle Joe still lingered on the step to give and receive a few parting instructions.

“First van to your right, on getting out. I saw them put in myself, the trunk and the hamper. First van, don’t forget.”

“And you’ll write every day—just a line, that I may know it’s all right. And if it shouldn’t be all right, you’ll telegraph. You promise me that?”

Of course he promised that, and twenty other things besides.

“Time’s up; you’ll be off directly.”

“Oh dear! oh dear!”

And then Mrs. Lane began to feel hot, and to think she could dispense with some of her wraps.

The whistle sounded.

“You’ve got your ticket all right?”

Then ensued a frantic search. Mrs. Lane had a bag, and in the bag was a pocket, and in the pocket was a purse, and in the purse was, or should be, a ticket. She had put it there, she knew she had, and so did

Uncle Joe—they had both seen it stowed away as safe as safe could be : they did not believe in necromancy, and in their cooler moments they would have sworn to its safety with their lives ; yet there now ensued a frantic search. The bag was not to be found, and when found it was not to be opened, and when opened, and the purse too, the ticket, though lying there snug enough, had become invisible to its owner's eyes.

Meanwhile the train was moving, and Uncle Joe's plump little person still graced the step. Rachel was at his coat tails, but he would have left them in her hand rather than relinquish the frantic hunt after the ticket.

“ Well, to be sure ; here it is. I knew I'd put it in.”

Of course she did, and so did he. It was not the ticket they had lost, but their heads.

Uncle Joe dropped from the step and flat on to his back (a faint shriek from one of the compartments) ; but he rebounded like

an india-rubber ball, and was after the train like mad.

“First van to your right. Saw them put in myself—hamper and trunk, and——”

The Arctic figure appeared for the last time, hoisting signals of distress. Could anything have been forgotten!

“Oh dear no!” Rachel asserted positively. She also asserted that she was dreadfully hungry, and dying for her breakfast; and taking Uncle Joe’s arm, got him out of the station, though not until the train was fairly out of sight.

Toby, being far too important a personage to be kept so long waiting, had been trotted quietly back to his stable; whilst his master, who always showed less consideration for himself than for any one else about the place, whether biped or quadruped, tucked his umbrella under one arm and his niece under the other, and trotted off, in his turn.

The nearest way home lay through Treherne park. As they turned down the

cross-path that led to the house, they were met by another couple sauntering slowly along, and keeping very close together.

"Mr. and Mrs. Treherne," whispered Uncle Joe, raising his hand involuntarily, as if to lift his hat, though they were ever so far away,

"The ex-schoolmaster and his wife," retorted Rachel, who had noticed the movement and resented it.

They stopped and spoke, and Rachel could not but admit that she had never seen a handsomer, pleasanter, or more happy-looking pair.

"Why, I always thought he was lame, and stammered," she observed, when they had passed on.

"To be sure, he was lame from his birth, and he does stammer occasionally, and so did his father before him. He would hesitate, and seem to lose his words when nervous or agitated, though no one had a grander way of speaking when he felt sure of his audience."

“Is Mr. Treherne very like his father?”

“Like his father and mother both. It’s only a wonder that he could be among us so long, and no one find it out.”

Rachel wondered how it would feel to be a half-starved schoolmaster one day, and the owner of a fine old name and fine old estate the next. She wondered, too, what it would feel like to be the great landed proprietor to-day, and to-morrow—nobody. Then it struck her, for the first time, that much as Aunt Mary had once offended, by her constant reference to the master of Treherne, and the fuss she made about him, just as if he were the Prince of Wales in person, or, indeed, the whole Royal family rolled into one, Mr. Rickharts had not once been mentioned by her, except when a visitor had asked whether she had seen him lately, and she had answered indifferently enough, “Oh dear no; he never comes near us.” Had it, then, been the position only that she had so revered—almost worshipped? Had the man and

his intrinsic worth nothing to do with the feeling which she had condemned as foolish and extravagant? Had it ceased to exist, or had it been transferred, at a moment's notice, to his successor, faithful, like that of a cat, to the place and its traditions, no matter who its lord might be? She certainly had twaddled on, good old soul, about Mr. and Mrs. Treherne, and their kindness and condescension. How she and Joe had been invited to dinner when Lord and Lady This, and the Marquis of That were staying in the house; and at the same time she recalled, in an awestruck underbreath, as the proudest boast of her life, that she had once had it in her power to serve them; for when they were still living at the cottage, and he, poor man, so ill, that no one had ever expected to see him about again, she had provided him with wine and jelly; not but what the merely neighbourly act had been amply repaid, and even far beyond its deserts, by the grand dinner at which they had assisted,



in company with the marquis and the lord.

All this passed through Rachel's mind, as she walked along in a, for her, unusual fit of silence.

"A hamper and a trunk; I saw them put in myself—first van. Her ticket—she had that all right; and her purse, and bag, and rug, and bonnet-box. I don't think anything *could* have been forgotten," muttered Uncle Joe, as he thought to himself. But Rachel had quick ears, and was down upon him at once. She could have given him a good shaking for being so absurd. It was not for a moment to be put up with, now that she had him in charge. So she scolded and laughed at him, and made him laugh too—yes, even at Aunt Mary, and her railway troubles.

When they reached home, they were both in high, good humour, and quite inclined to be satisfied with each other's company. When, after breakfast, he set off, having business at Didford, she gave him a fair

start, then flew after him with wraps of every kind, cloth, woollen, and knitted. Of course he scornfully rejected them, one and all, as if he had a mind quite above such old womanish coddling. Then he walked away briskly, even jauntily, actually swinging his stick, instead of leaning on it; and Rachel afterwards declared, taking a most ungenerous advantage of her triumph, with his hat on one side. But this he solemnly denied.

“What would auntie say!” laughed Rachel, as she leant over the gate, and watched him tripping down the road.

The sun was high up in the heavens now, unshadowed by cloud or mist. It was too hot for a walk, so she might as well go in and write her letters. She had long owed Aunt Julia one; and Charlie—yes, she would answer his letter first. He could never be her husband, never—that was quite out of the question; but she rather liked the idea of getting letters all the way from India; and he was Cousin Charlie still,

and always must be, though she would never marry him, or any one else, now papa had come home. She would write that very day, and remind him of his promise to come back to her as soon as possible. Then, still looking down the road, she thought of something uncle had said to her during that homeward walk, and which she had listened to in saucy disdain—something about Henry Barnett it was. She had refused him by letter, point-blank; but if he took it into his head to walk up to the Cottage that evening, she did not think she would much mind—indeed, it would be rather good fun. Of course he would never dream of making love to her again; and if he did—well, that would be good fun too! She did not see—— Oh dear, how hot the sun was, and she had forgotten her hat.

Yes, it was very hot, and they were lucky who could enjoy the long, bright summer day at their ease. John Treherne could, in the luxurious coolness of the great, silent library, where he sat among his books, with nothing

to break the magic spell of the hour but the soft stealing to his side of his wife Agatha, in the fresh, cool, dainty muslin that had superseded the less elegant print, with a word, a kiss, a caress, which he scarcely noticed, but which he would have missed had it been wanting to the pleasant solitude of that still, bright morning. Carlton Rickharts was less fortunate, and not nearly so cool and placid, as he worked his day through in the big, ugly building—his brows very closely knitted, the pale lips sternly set, and the great drops standing out upon his forehead.

He was not the man, as we know, to waste at any time a great many words where one would suffice; but to-day an almost oppressive silence lay over the huge building. The looks, too, that met his on every side were anything but pleasant—dark, surly, or rebellious, though awed into submission by the overmastering influence of his immediate presence. Master and men both knew that a crisis was at hand.

## CHAPTER VI.

"I CAN but repeat what I said the other day."

"You need not repeat it. I remember all you said, and I have thought the matter over, and agree with you perfectly. Private individuals and personal sympathies must be sacrificed to a great moral principle. It is strange how, in tracing throughout the fate of nations, you see this exemplified. Only yesterday I was reading——"

The blue eyes were growing dreamy and abstracted, and had wandered away to a particular shelf, and a particular volume on that shelf. But Mr. Rickharts pulled rather desperately at his beard, then set all the brown curly hair straight on end on his

head, and gave the table a kick which brought the dreamer's gaze back to his face, and the dreamer's mind back to the matter he had at heart—so terribly at heart.

“The men will strike, no doubt of that, and there will be a row and a violent demonstration of some kind, or their object would hardly have been gained. They are not a bad lot, on the whole; but under the influence of excitement and drink, an Englishman is capable of everything.”

Mr. Treherne turned pale, as he always did at the mention of crime or violence. The manager saw it, but was not surprised. As a Treherne, it was the very thing he would have expected of him.

“I gave them to understand that I was acting entirely on my own responsibility, and that you had no concern in the matter. But I should not wonder if they were to try and annoy you.”

“And you?”

“Oh, I am safe enough,” with a careless shrug. “They would never dare to attack

me. They know that unless they were to shoot me dead," with a grim smile, "I should be but little the worse for any attack they might be pleased to make upon me. But as you were speaking the other day of a tour in Scotland—you have whole clans there of kilted relations, who are dying to make you welcome to their glens and bagpipes—I think it would be as well to get Mrs. Treherne out of the way."

"Yes, yes," assented the squire with some eagerness. "I would not have Mrs. Treherne annoyed. We must see what can be managed."

"The sooner you start the better."

"Yes, yes, to be sure. I understand; but there's that affair of Grendol's."

"Leave that to me. I'll ride over at once and settle it. When could you start for Scotland?"

"I'll talk it over with Mrs. Treherne—she must not be frightened or annoyed—and let you know this evening."

He accompanied the manager to the

courtyard, saw him mount, and ride off in the direction of Norton.

“An hour’s hard riding each way, and a stiffish piece of business to settle,” he muttered to himself.

He left a message for Mrs. Treherne, then paused, looking down the park towards a certain bend in the river, where lay the Works, surrounded by the model village. The walk was a long one, a far longer one than he was accustomed to take. He would find it weary work, painful too, perhaps. But he felt instinctively, without having reasoned upon the subject, that it would be better for him to go down on foot than riding or driving.

So he walked down quietly, and arrived just as the men were about to leave off work.

He went up at once to the manager’s office, where sat old Mr. Mayne, as he had sat for the last thirty years, the factotum and humble, obedient servant of successive managers, who had successively bullied,



overworked, patronized, and sat upon him. That was all in the way of business, and not at all worth mentioning; but that he should have lived to see a *strike*, not threatened only, but a *bona fide* strike, such as he had read of in the papers, in the Works where he had been employed for thirty years—that the place should be shut up, and work suspended, filled him with indescribable dismay. For the last few days life had been a burden to him: he had ceased to find pleasure in anything—in his evening pipe and newspaper, his slippers, the aromatic contents of the well-seasoned teapot, in which his soul had hitherto delighted. But what were they to him, or life itself, when there was to be a *strike*! He no longer took pride in his hair, or even in his whiskers. He no longer smiled as he arranged and caressed his carefully got up shirt-collar. He looked scared, limp, and depressed. And so the squire found him.

His sudden appearance there he took

as a bad sign, a very bad sign: he had never visited the place before, and could only have come now as the angel-herald of doom.

Mr. Mayne rose hurriedly, and bowed very low. "What was Mr. Treherne's pleasure?"

"To speak to the men. He must get them all together, that he might speak with them."

This was easily accomplished, as they were all just leaving off work. The five o'clock bell had rung, and all were hurrying to the gates, when Mr. Mayne stopped them.

On hearing who it was who awaited them, they felt pretty sure that they would now have it all their own way. Would he have dared to come among them had he not been ready to yield to their demands?

"Not he," cried a short, heavy, ill-favoured youth, who never lost an opportunity of saying something coarse and brutal. "He's not the brass for that.

He's taken fright, that's what he has, he and the other chap. They see we mean what we say, and they've had to knock under. They can talk big enough when there's nothing to lose by it; but I know well enough——”

But the door had opened, and Mr. Treherne, followed closely by poor Mr. Mayne, who looked more scared and miserable than ever, stood among them.

The looks that met him on all sides were not encouraging—dark, scowling, sullen, or defiant, and the general griminess of the men's appearance did not tend to improve it. Unfortunately, too, he knew too much of the class with whom he had to deal. He had lived among them, and knew them to be capable of anything. How often, as John Rawdon, had he felt himself a coward, a downright coward, when brought face to face with one such burly, soot-begrimed figure; and now he had to meet and defy them all—as John Treherne, however, which made all the difference.

Before speaking, he looked quietly around, his eye resting, grave and steadfast, on each separate face. He knew what was expected of him; and if Carlton Rickharts had not set the matter clearly before him as a great public duty, involving the welfare of the nation at large, they would not have had to ask twice. The manager was right; but he was a stern, uncompromising man, who might not perhaps trouble himself to explain to the hands his motives, however just and honourable they might be. From his cradle upwards his word had been law, and when he now for the first time found it disputed, he would feel but little disposed to conciliate.

It was with no intention of making a speech that John Treherne had come there; but he did make one, and was as eloquent almost as those famous orators of old of whom he had read so much. The choice simplicity of his language, the low, rich music of his voice, the almost spiritual delicacy of the fair face, now flushed with

earnestness and faintly smiling, were not without their effect.

He told them at starting that he had come there as their friend, and because he could not bear the idea of their throwing themselves out of work, and turning their wives and children out of the comfortable homes that had been built for them; but he also made them understand, at the same time, what was the decision he had come to announce. "It would, no doubt, involve a certain amount of loss to himself; but that he was quite prepared to meet—indeed, as the master of Treherne," with something of quiet, stately pride, "he was, in a measure, independent of them. But were it otherwise, no money considerations would influence his conduct or that of Mr. Rickharts; they had set themselves and their personal interests entirely on one side. It was not the extra money they grudged the men, but they disapproved of the spirit in which the demand had been made—a spirit that, if

encouraged and persevered in, must ultimately work the English mechanic more harm than good, by endangering the commercial welfare of the country."

He then set the whole matter as clearly before them as the manager had set it before him; his words less stern, perhaps, but not less forcible. If they could not appreciate his motives, they should at least be made to understand them.

When at last he paused, there came a murmur, confused and anything but reassuring in its sound; one or two of the men even, the biggest and sootiest of them, advanced a step, growling behind their beards.

Mr. Treherne advanced too, his face flushed still, and smiling.

"My men, I don't want to have the talk all to myself. If you have anything to say to me, any one of you, I'll listen to you as you have done to me."

Most of the men present believed, or had up to the present moment, that they had

ever so much to say. They had declared their intention of having it out with the squire, and had boasted that they would soon make him hear reason, if only they could get alongside of him.

Fortune had favoured them in that respect at least, and brought him among them face to face. There he stood, calm and smiling, ready to hear whatever they might have to say. Slight, frail, leaning on the heavy stick that had been his companion for so many years, there could be nothing in the man himself to silence or overawe them—nothing but the mere fact of his position. It was really hard upon them. The one man awed them into silence by his height, the breadth of his chest, the strength of his limbs, the stern power that marked every feature of the mighty face; whilst the other awed them equally into silence, by the mere fact of being the master of Treherne.

The confused murmur had ceased. The men who had taken one step forward took

two back, and growled no more behind their beards.

“If you won’t speak up for yourselves, I’ll speak for you,” and now both flush and smile had died out; “and I defy you, as honest, right-thinking Englishmen, to deny the truth of what I say. I have known most of you from my childhood. I have gone in and out among you, and know pretty well the stuff you are made of—the right stuff, after all; and in your calmer, more dispassionate moods, I would rely upon your judgment, and trust you as I would myself, or rather, a better man.”

Then, with consummate skill, he set the case, their own case, before them as it really stood. “It was not for self or home, wife or bairn, that they had made the demand, but because some restless, turbulent spirits had excited them to rebellion, and put it into their heads that it would be a fine thing for them to make a display of their power, and bully their employers into submission. They had wasted much breath,



but very little thought upon the matter. They had not paused to reflect upon the expediency of what they were about to do, but had acted upon impulse, regardless of consequences. If in saying all this he wronged them, they had but to justify their motives, as he had done his; he would be only too glad to hear one of them speak."

But no one spoke, though he paused again and waited.

"You know our decision. We have acted as we think for the best; you have only now to do the same. You are the best judges of your own interests; but one thing I know—if you are actuated by any mean or unworthy motives; if you throw yourselves recklessly out of work, and turn wife and children out of their comfortable homes; if you are driven to acts of violence, it will be long before you again hold up your heads as honest English workmen, or feel an honest pride in yourselves and your labour. However you may decide, I have made up my mind to loss, and have no fear of

violence. But there is one thing I would tell you before we part, for I think it right that you should know it. When I first came into the property—having been kept out of it so many years, as you know, through a mistake—I was strongly advised to sell the Works. I had a very good offer, with which I should certainly have closed, had it not been for Mr. Rickharts. He said that ‘where so many honest workmen were dependent upon me—men who had for years worked in the Treherne interests—some consideration was due to them. The man who had made me the offer was a hard, tyrannical, unscrupulous master, who cared but little whom he employed, or how he treated those who were employed, so long as the profits were sure. The men had been true to their master, and the master should be true to them.’ As I had a great respect for Mr. Rickharts’ judgment, and would trust it before that of any man living, I kept on the Works. Some months afterwards, soon after my return from

abroad, there was, as you may remember, a general stagnation in trade. Most of the masters turned off half their hands. I was advised to do so too. There was not work enough to employ you all or pay your wages, and I was advised to turn half of you off. But again Mr. Rickharts indignantly protested. 'The relation between master and men,' he said, 'should not be a mere matter of loss and gain. He had never looked upon it in that light. The welfare of the Works, viewed far more in connection with you and your interests than his own, as the centre of all your labours and prosperity rather than as a source of wealth to himself, had from his boyhood lain very near to his heart.' He told me plainly that it was my duty to stand by you ; 'that, being more independent than most of loss and gain, it would be a shame to send so many fine fellows to the poor-house, or begging from door to door, as had been the case with hundreds of others.' It was then he asked to become your manager.

His great object was to provide you with work—not for any thought of profit to himself or me, but out of respect for the manly pride and independence of each true-hearted man among you. I—I—have nothing more to say.”

The last words, unlike all that had gone before, sounded nervous and abrupt; his head drooped, a shiver as of exhaustion ran through him, and he leant more heavily upon his stick.

There was a slight stir among the foremost group. He turned abstractedly as if to leave the room; then suddenly his head erected itself, his face lighted up, flush and smile returned, brighter both than ever, and he held out his hand.

“I should be sorry to lose sight of so many old familiar faces. Others, of course, will take your place, but I could never feel the same for them as I do for you, who have known me so many years. If there is one among you who has a kindly feeling for the squire—as many of you, I know, had

for the schoolmaster—I should be glad to shake hands with him.”

The men in the foremost group looked sheepish and embarrassed. The three big, sooty figures that had taken a forward step once before took another forward step now; then, as before, stopped short.

“But if there is one among you who will lay aside all private feelings and unworthy motives, and come forward as the friend of justice and order, I shall be proud indeed if he will shake me by the hand. Indeed, I don’t see, however you may decide, what harm it could do either you or me, to shake hands for the last time as friends. I think you would be glad to remember it afterwards, and so should I.”

Then he again held out his hand, and the biggest and most formidable of the group elbowed his way unceremoniously through, and grasped it with a heartiness that was equally gratifying and painful.

The beautiful blue eyes lighted up, but they filled, too, and the sensitive lip

quivered. The iron grip of that soot-be-grimed hand had touched him more nearly than all the affectionate handshakings of his newly found cousins—my Lord This, and my Lady That, or even his Grace the Duke of —.

“We never had any feeling of ill will to you, or Mr. Rickharts neither, and it was not in that spirit we acted.”

The words were growled out rather than spoken, and not a muscle of the grim countenance relaxed; but the squire was satisfied.

“We thought that maybe, having been for so many years as one of us, if you’ll excuse the liberty, you wouldn’t grudge us the trifle extra,” growled another, who, at a fresh appeal from the squire, condescended to have his big, grimy paw clasped caressingly in the white, delicate fingers.

“And you were right. If you bear me no ill will, I can honestly say I bear you none. As the owner of the Works, I can’t yield to your demand, because it would be setting a

bad example ; but as a friend, I shall be always ready to listen to you ; and I shall be glad to see any of you up at Treherne. I think I understand you now, and the class to which you belong, better than I ever did before, thanks to Mr. Rickharts, who has taught me the value of a useful, hard-working, independent life."

Several more had now stepped forward from the group, and more grimy hands might have condescended to be shaken ; but John Treherne was fairly exhausted at last, and was beginning to feel faint—so faint that, Giles Morris, the big-bearded giant who had been the first to come forward, still happening to stand beside him, he laid his hand involuntarily upon the half bare, brawny arm, as if for support, and they left the room and the Works together.

" Shall I call your carriage, Mr. Treherne ? " inquired Mr. Mayne, who, in a nervous flutter of excitement, had throughout kept at a respectful distance behind the squire.

"Thank you, I walked here, and shall walk back. But perhaps," with an almost wistful look into the rough, ugly face of his new friend, Giles Morris, "you could walk part of the way back with me—that is, if you do not mind."

It had not been Giles Morris' intention to do anything of the kind. He would have preferred going home, or to the "public," to talk the matter over with the other chaps. But he was not, on the whole, an ill-natured fellow; and the slight, halting figure, the pale, tired face, and retaining hand appealed to him. For a moment he ceased to be the workman, and was only the man.

They walked on together quite amicably as far as the park gates, and the usually taciturn Giles even deigned to be communicative; and so interested was John Treherne, that he quite forgot the length of the way, though too weary and exhausted to make any response. They might have enjoyed each other's company longer yet,



but leaning over the gate was Mrs. Treherne, looking anxiously down the road. Catching sight of her, Giles Morris stopped short in his sentence and his walk, growled out some unintelligible excuse, and made off.

"Oh, John, I was so frightened; I thought you might, perhaps, have gone down, after all, to those horrid Works, to speak to those dreadful men."

"I was down there."

An exclamation of horror.

"How wrong of you! How shocking!" And Mrs. Treherne clung closer all the way home, thanking God that he had come back to her safe and sound.

"Not shocking at all. Mr. Rickharts was right. On the whole, they are fine fellows, though rough and turbulent. I only regret I did not know them better when I lived among them. Their roughness of manner, and loud, coarse voices, seemed to make anything like association with them so impossible. It is strange that

nothing of all this affects me now ; on the contrary, it inspires me, I do believe, with more of admiration than disgust. I seem to understand them so much better, to sympathize with them as I never could before ; and I hope and think that the squire will find them truer friends than the schoolmaster did."

"How could they be your friends, or you theirs, when they did not understand you ? " the little wife broke in, indignantly. Her sympathies were far more with the smooth-spoken, affectionate relations, who were so high bred, and made such a fuss about John, than with the rude men, whose coarse, unfeeling manners had so often made her hero suffer.

"That's just it, wife. We did not understand each other. We stood towards each other in a false position."

"A false position ! I should think so indeed ! " with a toss of the pretty, classical head. "The heir of Treherne forced

to associate with such an ill-conditioned crew ' .

John smiled and shook his head. That was not quite what he had meant.

## CHAPTER VII.

CARLTON RICKHARTS, having settled the business entrusted to him, went straight home. He had made the squire a sort of half-promise to call in on his way back, but this promise he did not keep. It would be out of his way, it was late, and he was not in particularly good spirits, or temper either. If he went he would be shown into the drawing-room, and there treated to Mr. Treherne's honeyed words, his wife's sweet smiles, and coffee. All this in his present mood seemed anything but desirable, and he went straight home.

But late though it was, he was not to have the evening to himself. There came a subdued ring at the bell, a subdued knock

at his parlour-door, and Mr. Mayne's head appeared through the smallest possible opening. What had happened? Had the men taken advantage of his absence to get up a row? His brow darkened, and his hand clenched itself.

But it was quite another tale Mr. Mayne had to tell. Mr. Treherne had been down to the Works himself. Had harangued the men; had got them to shake hands; had spoken so boldly and clearly, that it was just a wonder to hear him; had told them that neither he nor Mr. Rickharts feared their violence, or would be deterred by it from doing their duty; but that he hoped, for their own sakes, etc.

Mr. Mayne, whose deference to a superior made of him a very good listener, repeated the squire's speech almost word for word.

Carlton Rickharts listened in silence, with raised brows. He hardly knew whether to admire or condemn, to be amused or vexed. It was a plucky thing to do, and he admired pluck; but, on the other hand, he could

ill brook any interference, nor did he approve of the men being won over by soft words, subtle flattery, and dramatic handshakings. It was true that the orator had shown no fear, and made no concessions, so that the victory, if victory it should prove, would be entirely on the side of the employers; but that hardly satisfied him. Had the plan been submitted to him, he would have vigorously opposed it; but the matter had been taken out of his hands, and so—— He shrugged his shoulders, stretched himself, pushed back impatiently his hair from the forehead, lined, by the last few months, as it had not been by the thirty previous years of his life, and fell to wondering how it was, that the man, who had found it impossible to manage a handful of unruly boys, should have taken upon himself to turn a set of unruly, desperate characters, and should have succeeded, as he, with his superior knowledge, long experience, and iron strength of will, had in the present instance failed to do.

Long after Mr. Mayne had left him he still thought the matter over, but hardly came, after all, to the right conclusion.

That evening Mr. Mayne was too much excited to appreciate the flavour of his tea, or even the comfort of his slippers, arm-chair, and newspaper ; but the next morning there was a decided improvement in his general appearance, more especially about the hair, collar, and whiskers. There was also a marked improvement in the general aspect of things at the Works.

When Mr. Rickharts made his usual round of inspection, he no longer met the lowering, antagonistic looks to which he had lately been accustomed ; and though a few among the many faces were still dark and sullen, he could not but confess that John Treherne's victory had been more complete than he, or even his more sanguine factotum, had supposed.

In the evening he walked up to Treherne, and in the park he met its master and mistress.

"Can I have a word with you? I shall not detain you five minutes," he said abruptly, glancing at the lady, who blushed and laughed, said very meekly that she would go in and dress for dinner, and then begged him quite earnestly to stay and dine with them, with soft words, and pretty, shy looks, to which, rude savage that he was, he appeared wholly insensible, and curtly refusing the invitation, turned at once to the business he had in hand.

"I wish he had not changed so!" sighed Agatha, as she left the two men together. "It is quite natural, of course. He can't get over his loss, or forget, generously though he behaved, that it was we who deprived him of all. But he is so cold and stern, and he was never that before—at least, to me!" And she looked down ruefully at the beautiful diamond ring he had given her on her wedding-day, and which had so often shed a light around when all else was dark.

Though Agatha Treherne, in her womanly



vanity, delighted to deck out her little person every now and then, on grand occasions, in the family jewels, on the one finger had never been placed, and never would be placed, any other rings but the two she had received on her wedding-day, from her husband and Carlton Treherne.

“He was so gentle, so generous, so kind. When my babies died he was so sorry for me, and he was the only one to whom I ever dared speak of them. I could not show how grateful I was then—how could I! And now, when John could be to him as a brother, and I, if he would let me, like a sister, he is so cold and distant and disagreeable.”

Was not the feeling that almost brought the tears to her eyes as much pique as anything else? Was she not, womanlike, piqued to find that the soft looks and words that, in the days of her humiliation, had drawn to her the big, generous heart, had entirely lost their power; that being no longer Agatha the governess, or Agatha the

poor schoolmaster's wife, but pretty, fashionable, universally admired Mrs. Treherne, she was no more to him, and never could be again, than any other woman of his acquaintance, old or young, handsome or plain?

"I hope you don't disapprove of what I did yesterday?" John Treherne asked, quite anxiously, of his companion, as soon as they found themselves alone.

"It is as well that you did not consult me in the matter. As it is, you know the saying, 'The successful can never be in the wrong.' It is an experiment that may be tried once with success, but it would hardly do to repeat it."

"I hope it may not be needed."

"I hope not. If the affair blows over, the men will be ashamed enough of themselves. It has all been the work of one or two vicious, unprincipled fellows, who talked the others into believing themselves aggrieved. They at least shall be turned off, to prevent further mischief, and serve as a warning to the rest."

John Treherne shrank back a little—severity was always painful to him; but he said nothing.

“I have already got the names of two or three; and the worst among them, an idle, vicious, abandoned youth, you will be glad, I know, to see turned out of the place, for he was an old enemy of yours.”

John Treherne felt the red blood mount slowly up to his very temples, but he only answered very quietly.

“You mean Jim Bates?”

Mr. Rickharts nodded. “You once recommended his being turned, as a black sheep, out of the village. I remember——”

“And you said that his being turned out of one village would not prevent his going to another and working mischief there instead of here. You were right, and I was wrong. I have never forgotten your words. You said that unless he could be blotted from the face of the earth, transported for life, or chained up like a wild beast, it could do no good to send him away. That it was

a common mistake of the world to hide away out of sight whatever was disagreeable, and then to persuade themselves that it had been effectually got rid of."

Carlton Rickharts' brows had been gradually on the ascent, and had now reached a height to which they had never before attained. He had said all that, had he—and to the village schoolmaster? But the Squires of Treherne had plenty of leisure for establishing theories, and setting others right by them. He had, no doubt, thought it all out when lying at his ease beneath that druidical oak, and the schoolmaster, happening to pass, had been favoured with the result. Unquestionably, the squire had been right, and the schoolmaster and manager wrong. If turned out of the Works, Jim Bates would carry his vices and evil influences elsewhere, and be all the more dangerous, perhaps, from the fact of his character not being known, or his evil propensities recognized, as they were in his native place. But, on the other

hand, he had quite made up his mind to turn the fellow off.

"Let him go to the devil!" was his not very philanthropic mental exclamation; "he may know what to do with him—I don't." Then he turned on his companion a comically expressive look. "It was too bad, by Jove! That was the second time that he had opposed and almost beaten him, on his own ground, too."—"Every one for himself, and God for us all," he said carelessly, at last. "As I can't be manager of all the Iron Works in England, it would be as well, perhaps, to insure the interests of the one. It must be as I said."

"Jim Bates will be turned off?"

"And a few more whose names I have."

"You know best, of course; you must. You were always the man of thought and action, I am only the man of thought. Sometimes I seem to see things so clearly, and then they slip from me. I cannot grasp the present, and at the same time look far on into the future, as you do. I

would rather it had been any other than he ; but you must decide."

The conversation then turned to other matters, business matters all of them ; but in little more than the prescribed five minutes the squire was released.

Though it was bright, warm, summer weather without, within, in the lofty rooms, it looked dull, and felt chilly of an evening without the cheery wood fire.

When, after dinner, John drew one of the great carved chairs close up to the grate, and almost disappeared within it, Agatha knew that he had something on his mind. It had always been a trick of his in times of perplexity or trouble to take the fire, rather than any one else, into his confidence. It alone could recall to him scenes and feelings of which no one else knew anything.

Looking into its glowing embers, as he was doing now, no one, not even Agatha, could see what he saw. They were growing fainter, those memories of the past ; in a

few more years they would, no doubt, have passed out of his life altogether. But to-night they crowded in upon him urgently. There was the stile—how distinctly he saw it—and the cloudless blue of the sky, the shadowy lane, and the field beyond. There was a hum of insects in the mysterious depths of the overgrown hedge; silence elsewhere, so deep and restful a silence. A cloud, white and motionless, lying beneath the sky, and framed around by its blue. High up, almost beyond the sight of man, and within the circle of the cloud, a lark, its wings still mounting upward, its song borne downward, deepening yet more the eternal silence of nature. A smile, a sigh, a thrill of rapture. A coarse laugh, the approach of voices, bitter taunts; then the one word blotting out all the rest, and the light of day, and the summer green. A pale, bent, miserable figure stealing away to hide his shame, no matter where. The big, deserted schoolroom, with its unchecked noontide glare; the schoolmaster's desk,

and before it the schoolmaster himself. The bowed head, the crushed spirit, the bitter tears that fell.

“If it had been *any one* but he,” he murmured, half aloud; “any one but he. I wish it had. It seems like a revenge.”



## CHAPTER VIII.

“NONSENSE, uncle ; he knows it quite as well as I do. I wrote and told him that it was no use his thinking of me, not a bit, for I didn’t care for him, and never should ; that was when I was at the rectory, and rather dull, as you may suppose.” She did not add—perhaps she did not herself realize—that her rejection of poor Harry might have been less ungracious, if even as definite, had not handsome Cousin Charlie been relieving just then the dulness and monotony of her life.

“I told him I had quite made up my mind not to marry him, or any one else. I don’t know that I *had* quite made up my mind then,” blushing a little, and looking down, and playing with the fringe of her

tunic, "except as regarded him; but I have quite made up my mind now."

"To be an old maid?" mischievously. Rachel was actually teaching Uncle Joe the art of teasing. What would Aunt Mary say to that?

"I don't mind being an old maid at all. You must be something; and when you're old, I don't think it much matters what else you are. It's quite a different thing being an old maid because you *will*, to being an old maid because you *must*. In the former case, you're not an old maid at all, but a maiden lady!" with an assumption of staid dignity that made Uncle Joe laugh.

"We thought at one time you would marry Charlie Wilkinson."

"I thought so myself at one time, and so did he; but that was before I had quite made up my mind. He is now in India, poor fellow. I heard from him yesterday, and I think I should have made up my mind, about him at least, long before, had I

known what stupid letters he wrote. Fancy having a lover who fills four pages with gossip of the 'mess,' the ball-room, the 'fellows ;' who tells you, point-blank, that all the girls are after him, and calls it 'a bore ;' who hopes you are well ; who begins, 'My dear Rachel,' and ends, 'Your affectionate cousin,' *et voilà tout !*"

Rachel was accompanying Uncle Joe through the wood that led to Wickledean. He was going there for a game of whist. He had few weaknesses, had Mr. Lane ; but whist was one of the few, and unlike the generality of fancies that, rampant in youth, are abandoned by our sober elders as being all vanity and vexation of spirit, it only strengthened with every year. He had been trying hard to persuade his niece to favour the Barnetts with her company. "Mrs. Barnett would be so delighted, and Mr. Barnett, and the Misses Barnett—and Master Barnett." And thus it was that the young gentleman's matrimonial intentions had been brought forward.

But Rachel, out of mere wilfulness, would not be coaxed. She had no particular objection to going there, as a rule, but to-day she fancied that she had half a dozen at least. "What! waste the long, bright, wonderful evening in the hot, gaudy drawing-room; feast her eyes on worsted-work bouquets, when dog-roses, and honeysuckle, and white, tangled clematis were within her reach! She would not go with him a step beyond the gate that led to the high-road."

So at the gate they parted, and she turned back into the wood, and finding for herself a seat as far removed from the public path as possible, sat down, and yawned. Then remembering a letter she had received that morning, she slipped her hand into her pocket, but let it lie there awhile, her chin resting on the open palm of the other.

The walk had been a long one, and she was tired.

A capricious breeze was playing in the

tree-tops, and as from time to time it swayed and bent the branches, she could see the glowing sunset sky beyond. She was glad of the breeze and the sunset. She was glad to be alone. There was an unusual cloud upon the little upturned face; she was thinking of her letter. "Business may detain me another fortnight or so." Another fortnight, and she had expected him back in a day or two, at furthest. But if even he had said another fortnight quite definitely, she would not have minded so much. It was the little addition "or so" that troubled her. It might mean three weeks, or even a month; and she had quite come to the conclusion, that life without the grave man of business, who wasted so few words, and so little of his time, upon her, was altogether worthless. She missed the fine, portly presence, the imperious command, the rare, lingering caress. There was some excitement in trying to please him, she could never tire of that; but she did tire of making nosegays for the Cottage drawing-

room table, and feeding the poultry, and even of amusing and teasing poor old Uncle Joe; and more than all, she tired—oh, how she did tire!—of Henry Barnett, and his persistent love-making.

For a time, after that sudden, unexpected meeting in Treherne park, she had been kept alive by the constant fear of a visit from Mr. Rickharts. She quite expected he would call, and got into a foolish way of starting at the sound of every bell, and glancing nervously at the door, calculating her chances of escape. If he should call in the evening, it would be all right; she could then shake hands, and smile and retire, leaving him to be entertained by Uncle Joe. But if he should come in the afternoon, when she was all alone! She would tell Jane that he was not to be admitted. No, that would be absurd. Why should they not meet and talk together as old friends—nothing more? Everything had so changed for them both, that the past could never return for either;

but why should they not talk together pleasantly? He might stay the whole afternoon if he so pleased, and neither be the worse for it now. He would not, of course, allude to the wild, rapturous folly of that midsummer's dream. If he did, she would look him steadily in the face, and laugh and tell him that she made a point of forgetting whatever was disagreeable; and as she found the present so much pleasanter than the past had ever been, she preferred living in it altogether.

In all probability she would, if tried, have said nothing of the kind. Set speeches, unless parliamentary, or made for some great public occasion, never do come off; but she need not have troubled herself to make it, for Mr. Rickharts did not call. When she casually mentioned her fear to Mr. Lane, plaintively remarking—"How very disagreeable it would be if he should happen to call some afternoon expecting to see Aunt Mary," he did his best to reassure her, telling her she might just as well expect

a visit from the Shah of Persia. Mr. Rickharts had not come near them for months; he kept down at the Works, devoted himself exclusively to business, and was just then in great trouble about his men, who threatened to strike.

"He must have a hard life of it down there," the old gentlemen had added, pityingly, "and he must feel it all the more from having been used to such a very different position. He does feel it, whatever people may say, and for all he looks so strong and cold."

To all this Rachel had made no answer; but she had crept quietly away to her own little room.

It was the room she had always had, though now that she was of age, and a more important personage altogether, Mrs. Lane had offered her the best spare, with a handsome mahogany four-poster and furniture to match. An offer which had, however, been declined with thanks. She was fond of her own little room, she had



said quite humbly, and would much rather keep it.

She had entered it very softly on that particular evening; very softly, too, she had crept to the window, and leaning her arms upon the sill, had looked out, far out to where, on the other side of the river, lay Treherne Park, with its slopes and gigantic groups of trees, over which the late evening mist was falling. Lower it had fallen, however, and lower, until slope and tree were hidden, and nothing was to be seen but that grey, shadowy veil.

How often had she watched it gather and fall before, and with what different feelings; but never with the same feelings as on that night. Where, but a few hours before had lain uninterrupted sunshine, that cold, sad mist had fallen like a shroud, and buried all out of sight; strain her eyes as she might, she could see nothing more. Then there had stolen over her a sense of irreparable loss, of loneliness, of desolation. It was not, however, of herself she was thinking,

but of the man she had so loved. How dreadful it must have been to lose all, all he had ever had, at one blow! Fortune, position, name. The beautiful old place, with its historical associations. He might be cold and strong and brave, but he had suffered, oh—how he must have suffered! She recalled him as she had known him once, the imperious, careless lover, the haughty master of Treherne. She recalled him as she had seen him last, with his worn look, heavy, anxious brow, and grey, solemn eyes. They had brightened a little at sight of her; but she had been cold, careless, and indifferent. She had not realized then how much he had suffered. She was happy, and what was he to her! So she had laughed and gone her way, and he had turned, and with slow, weary steps—she had noticed even then how weary his step had seemed—had gone his. After all her wild, despairing dreams, and longings and passionate yearnings, it was thus they had met and parted, and she had been

satisfied. She never wished to see him again; and yet once, when he had everything, he had called her his little love, and told her that he cared more for her than for anybody or anything else in the world. Now that he had nothing but hard work and trouble—he was alone.

She felt her heart swell, and her lip quiver, and her eyes fill, so fast that even the evening mist was now hidden from them. It was so hard—so cruel! She was so sorry for him!

No doubt she was, for she had a warm, impulsive heart; but, in all probability, had she met him the next day, it would have been the old story over again—smiles and dimples, laughing brown eyes, and saucy words. Women have no more control over their looks than they have over their hearts. They oftener than not look one thing and mean another. But it's not their fault. It's their nature.

## CHAPTER IX.

“WELL, Klint, what is it?”

The dog had started up, and stood with ears erect, and tail stiffening.

“You dear, stupid old thing! It was only a shot, and ever so far off. Why excite yourself needlessly, and at your age too!”

By this time she had got her arms round the big neck, now stiff as iron, and was hugging it to her.

Klint and his mistress had for some time past been once more the best of friends. He had no longer to lie all alone, with his head between his paws, dreaming sorrowfully of the past. There was nothing now to come between them. The young mistress had herself long since done with the past

and its dreams, so they again enjoyed the present right merrily together.

The fierce-looking tail gave a hurried wag in acknowledgment of the close caress, then erected and stiffened itself once more.

Rachel had grown tired of her own thoughts, and began to find her seat uncomfortable. The low easy-chair in the pretty, cool drawing-room at the Cottage would do quite as well, and she would be equally alone there. She had lost all pleasure in the wood.

The beauty of the evening was over. The sun had set; and though a long line of gold still reddened the far west, overhead the sky looked dark and stormy. There was a feeling of storm, too, in the air, in the breeze that not only moved, but now sighed through the trees.

“Come, Klint, let us go home.”

Yes, the beauty of the evening was over. As she walked slowly away, the wood seemed to darken and close around her, shutting out from her sight the bright, merry world

behind. There was an influence abroad that oppressed and saddened her. She tried to turn her thoughts into a pleasant channel; but pleasant thoughts will not always come at our bidding. The trees bent above her, and the wind sighed; and as the way seemed long, she fell to singing softly to herself—not the songs she had learnt of her London master, and of which she had been so proud—for she had a rich, sweet voice, which Mr. Raye was having cultivated for his own private gratification—but the old wild, droning hymn with which poor little Bertie had so often been lulled to sleep when all else had failed.

She was glad when they had left the wood behind them, with its tossings and mutterings, and stood once more on the broad level field with the broad level sky above. The golden rim in the far west was gone, and the whole sky was now overcast. There would certainly be a storm before the night was out; she already felt the chill of its approach. She gave a little shiver, and

then set off running, cheered by pleasant visions of a bright fire, her pet chair drawn up to it, a cosy tea which she and Klint would have all to themselves; and after tea she would write to papa, and sing over all his favourite songs.

Pleasant thoughts were crowding on her quite fast now. She stopped to take breath. She was not far from home; just the length of a field, and the orchard. Skirting the field on one side was a small wood or copse that had once been a favourite retreat of hers; for, though it led into the high-road, very few ever passed that way. Had Klint recognized in it an old friend? Coming in sight of it, he had at once dashed in; and Rachel, having crossed the field, leant against the orchard wall, waiting for him, patiently at first, watching the storm-laden clouds, and still humming to herself broken snatches of the quaint old hymn. Then she grew impatient, and called him.

He appeared at the entrance of the wood, and stood there in a strangely rigid, motion-

less attitude, his face turned towards her; and all her calling and coaxing would not bring him forward one step.

"One of his obstinate fits," she said, pettishly. "He wants me to go home through the wood; but I won't!"

She went up to where he still stood, waiting for her. Half crouching, his head stretched forward and low bent, he looked up at her without raising it, with solemn, appealing eyes.

"For shame, you naughty dog, not to come when I called you! You shall be led home by the ear, in disgrace!"

She put out her hand and touched the rough coat, then drew it back with a low cry of horror. It was soaked with blood! Had he been fighting? Was he hurt? What had happened?

Meanwhile the dog had turned, and was trotting slowly and heavily back into the wood, and she followed him.

He did not take her far. She soon saw him stop, then crouch down beside some-



thing that lay on the ground. She remembered the shot they had heard, and seemed to know what it meant. She squeezed her hands very tightly together, and shut her eyes; then, with an effort, opened them upon the figure of a man stretched at her very feet, his face turned upwards. His hands, as with a spasm of pain, had fallen together over his breast, and beneath them the blood oozed and bubbled.

“Dead!” She breathed out the word softly, as if she were only speaking of sleep; and she knelt down close to where the dog still crouched, and pushing back the hair that the wind had blown about her eyes, looked down upon the face that, with closed lids and stern-set features, lay just below her. It was not to identify it that she looked—she had done that at the first glance. Time was, and not so long ago, when there had been for her but the one face. She could not mistake it now.

She felt less frightened, perhaps less horrified, than she would have done had it

been any one else. She did not even recoil from the dark blood that had dyed the folded hands, and the man's clothes, and the earth that lay around, now that she knew it to be his blood. There was in her feeling nothing of the shuddering fear and horror of violent death; there was nothing in it, either, of passion or despair.

It was like going through it all in a dream. Kneeling there, crouching down beside the dog, she did not move, scarcely breathed, and was altogether powerless to act or even think. There was nothing to be done. He was dead, quite dead, cold and stiff, and therefore she did not care to touch him. Her touch could not bring him back to life. She had once thought—but that was madness—every thought of him had once been madness. He had been set before her as one altogether beyond her reach. He had condescended to notice and be amused by her, and then—then—he had looked at her—and—and kissed her, and she had gone mad. All that did not matter

now. She was cured, long since—and he—was—dead.

She could not have been kneeling there many seconds, but no hour of her life had ever seemed so long. There was a singing in her ears, a sensation of pain at her heart, a something gathering before her eyes. She had felt just so once before when, already faint and weary, his kiss had fallen upon her lips. Why was the whole earth so lifeless, pulseless, soundless, because that one figure lay stretched above it, dead?

The dog, more true in his instinct, and more fond in his impulse than the woman, was softly licking the pale hands, over which a thin streak of blood still flowed, silent and ceaseless. As he did so, a sudden convulsive quiver ran through the man's frame, and seemed to fill the earth once more with life and motion and sound. Rachel sprang up with a cry.

“Down, Klint—down! Watch by him till I come back!” And without a backward look, she dashed out of the wood, climbed

the orchard gate, and sped along the path at a rate that would at any other time have appeared incredible.

Klint, keeping his solemn watch, laid his head down upon the hands of which he had from the first taken possession, and without raising it, watched her out of sight.

## CHAPTER X.

“How dreadful, how very dreadful, to be sure! And you had him brought in here, and laid upon—the best spare-room bed. What will Aunt Mary say !”

“Where else could I have had him taken? Not all the way down to the river; it would have killed him. He was just outside our gate, and bleeding to death.”

Mr. Lane was by nature mild and merciful; but that a dead or dying man should, in his absence, have been brought to the house, and placed in the best spare bed, was a thing so awful, so unprecedented, that it almost exceeded the bounds of belief. And—what would the old woman say! The best spare-room, with its hand-

some new furniture! He still called it new—it had been that at least six years before; but at the Cottage nothing changed, or was allowed to grow old.

Rachel, feeling rather guilty, hardly knew whether to laugh or cry; the look of blank dismay in the broad face, and in the round eyes of poor Uncle Joe, was alike risible and pitiable. Had she, then, done something so very dreadful? She had acted entirely upon impulse. Having procured assistance, she had gone back to the wood, where Klint still watched in the same attitude in which she had left him.

Meanwhile, an awful change had passed over the already ghastly face. One of the men, stooping down, had said that he was dead; but the other had pointed to the blood that still flowed. He was lifted up, and laid upon the short ladder, the first thing that had come to hand. A horse-cloth had been stretched over it, and Rachel's cloak, torn off hastily and rolled up, made him a pillow.

"Where to, miss?" the men asked, as they lifted him up.

She knew that he lived at the Iron Works, down by the river somewhere. But a feeling had come over her that, dead or living, it would be dreadful to send him down there all alone. One hand had dropped away from the other, and trailed down—so strong in its strength, so weak now, in its utter helplessness; mechanically she lifted it, and held it in her own, as she answered abstractedly—

"He must be taken home, I suppose."

The man grunted. "He'll be gone before we get him there; he's bleeding to death a'most now. Every step is just so much life out of him."

So much life lost. And he had so little to lose. The Cottage was close at hand. There was the best spare bedroom. She could not let him bleed to death.

So to the Cottage and best spare-room he had been carried accordingly, Rachel walking beside him, and holding the cold,

dead hand, that it might not trail so forlornly.

It had all come quite naturally at the time ; but now Uncle Joe's round, scared eyes made her feel quite guilty.

"I couldn't help it," an unusual softness and tremor lying in her voice. "I couldn't let him bleed to death. And he is not on the bed, but only on the floor ; they laid him down there, with the horsecloth under him, and a pillow for his head. If you had found him, you would have brought him in, and so would Aunt Mary." The great brown eyes, and the large woman's heart, were too full to allow of her saying more just then.

"To be sure. Poor fellow ! Shot down. Murdered at one's very gate. Things are coming to a pretty pass ! I'll go and see him. You say the doctor is there ? I'll go and hear what he says." And the good old gentleman, after pushing his hat excitedly to the back of his head, where it was only held on by a miracle, and the



loyal attachment of the hat itself, perhaps, to the bald head it had protected for years, thrust his hands far down into his trousers pockets, and bustled off.

Rachel crept softly after him, and followed him noiselessly to the bedroom door. As it opened, she caught the faint murmur of voices, and long after it had closed, she still stood outside, waiting and listening. Then she stole away, and sat down on the stairs, where she could still keep it within the range of her eyes. What was going on there now? She half regretted having left it. She felt quite lonely and cast out. She might have been doing something for him. She had doctored him once before—with what different feelings! Resting her elbows on her knees, her chin on her open palms, she closed her eyes, and rocked herself to and fro. How she had loved him then! how she pitied him now!

Presently, watching and listening, her heart stood still. The door had opened, and Uncle Joe and the doctor came out. She

could hardly see them, the passage being but dimly lighted by the lamp in the hall below. She held her breath and crept down after them, noiseless as a shadow.

"I shall be back again in an hour, if possible," she heard the doctor say.

"And you really think it will be all over before morning?" This from Uncle Joe, in a pained, pitying voice. The answer she did not catch.

"Poor fellow! poor fellow!" muttered Uncle Joe, as he closed the hall door, and drew the bolt. Then he turned and saw Rachel, who had stolen close up to him.

"He says it will be all over before the morning."

"I know. I heard him say so."

"There is no one we could send for, I suppose? He seemed quite alone in the world."

"Quite alone. I—shall watch by him to-night."

"You, child! No, no. Go to bed and to sleep. I shall sit up, of course; and there's

.

Jane, should anything be wanted. But nothing will be wanted. He won't want for anything more now. He won't recover consciousness, or open his eyes again, the doctor says."

But Rachel answered that she couldn't go to bed; and if she did, she could not go to sleep. What mattered it to sit up one night? It would be all over before morning!

Uncle Joe, struck by the tone of her voice rather than by her words, looked at her one moment in silence. She returned the look, the great eyes dilating, and having in them the same look of suppressed passion that had lain in her words. Of this, however, she was quite unconscious. Uncle Joe was not blessed with a particularly good memory, but he remembered at that moment a certain long, bright summer, and certain doubts and suspicions he had entertained and wisely kept to himself.

Rachel watched the night through in the best spare-room, and it was such a comfort

to her to be there. Dying or dead, it was such a comfort, too, to have him there.

The doctor came again, as he had promised, and shook his head, and said it was just as he had foretold. It was the stupor of death; the pulse was growing feebler every moment.

When he was gone, Rachel rose, listened till she caught the sound of his step on the stairs, then went up to the bed, and bent low down over it. Some feeling was at work within her. It was not grief, but a vague sense of remorse, of a wrong that had to be atoned for before it was too late. In a few hours all would be over; he would be dead, cold, and stiff, and she would not care to touch him. But it was over the living face she now bent. The pulse still beat, if feebly; the heart still throbbed; and the lips, if cold, were not yet frozen into the eternal senselessness of death. Once, when he had been all the world to her, she had grudged him a kiss. He had never taken but the one, and that in all love and loyalty,

meaning to make her his wife and the mistress of Treherne ; and she had grudged it him, and felt bitter and angry and unjust. And afterwards, when she had heard that the imperious love of those bright summer days was a peasant-born changeling, nameless and penniless, she had—God forgive her!—remembered her love and his kiss, and resented both almost as an insult. In the hour of his humiliation she had forsaken him with the rest ; but now, when they had so long ceased to be anything to each other—now that he was dying, she would atone for the wrong, to her own heart at least. So she stooped to where, half hidden between the heavy moustache and beard, lay the man's lips, pale, and sternly set.

“ My darling,” she whispered, thinking of the past and future. “ My love—my lost, only love.” Then she returned to her seat. No woman's lips would ever touch his again. She smiled, as if there were comfort in that thought too.

In the dead of night, the storm, that had been threatening all the evening, broke over the house ; not a storm of thunder and lightning, but of wind and rain. It howled over the roof, drove furiously against the window, making it creak and rattle, and rushed on with a wild shriek, sobbing and moaning, as each successive gust lost itself in the far distance.

To Rachel, watching and listening, there seemed some mysterious connection between the storm-blast and the strong life, so suddenly cut off in violence and horror. But whilst it raged, he slept ! The worst was over. It could not rouse, it could not harm him now. If she had not found him——

There was a slight stir at the door, as of some one wanting to come in. She went and opened it. It was only Klint. He had been shut away in the stable, but had got loose, and found her out. He would not be in the way ; he would lie beside her whilst she watched. Had he not found him in the first instance, and led her to

him? Who had as good a right to watch beside him as they two, he and she!

"If *we* had not found him," ran on her thoughts, her hand on Klint's rough head—for the dog had crawled to her feet, and now rested it upon her knee—"he would have been lying out there in the storm; wind and rain would have been sweeping over him, and in the morning, or perhaps not even then, he would have been found dead, with no one near to—to—give him a last kiss before he went."

A start, then the girl and the dog nestling closer. A gust, wilder than any that had gone before, came sweeping over the house, tearing at the windows, and dying away in a prolonged wail.

Rachel crouched down on the ground; and, her arms clasped convulsively round Klint's neck, she hid her face in his shaggy coat. Was he dead? A little sooner or later, what did it matter? She dare not go and see; she could not be the first to look on his dead face. She could not!

## CHAPTER XI.

WHEN the news spread through Didford and its neighbourhood that Mr. Rickharts had been shot down, and carried dead, or dying, to Mr. Lane's house, the sensation it caused may well be imagined. The prevailing feeling, though not the only one, was indignation. A man murdered in cold blood, and left lying where he fell, out of reach of all probable help! And such a man, too!

As is invariably the case under such circumstances, the character of him they had lost rose at least fifty per cent. in the course of a few hours, and before the sun was well up in the heavens, he had been canonized by the unanimous voice of the



public. Each distinct class of society, both upper and lower, to neither of which he seemed but a few hours before to belong, standing alone and apart, having now made of him a hero, claimed him as its own, and chose to resent his murder as an outrage committed against itself.

“Some low Radical has done it!” cried Squire Puffer, indignantly, setting his neck stiffly into his stock, and looking unutterable things. “Couldn’t forgive him for being a gentleman in spite of his birth. More fool he for making such a fuss about them. Every Radical in the place deserves to be hanged, and should be if I could have my own way.”

The working-class, on their side, were equally sure that he had suffered for being their friend—for resisting oppression, and standing up for their rights.

The men at the Works said nothing. They went about their usual work, stolid and apparently unmoved. Each had his own thoughts, but felt little disposed to share

them with a neighbour who might know more of the matter than would be safe for him to own. Not a man among them but felt that he and the class to which he belonged had lost a true friend, and now remembered much that he had before found it more convenient to forget. But whatever their feelings, they did not give expression to them either by word or look; that being the way of Englishmen in general.

One Englishman, however, contrary to the rule, did give expression to his feelings in a very decided manner.

When Colonel Beverley heard that Carlton Rickharts had been shot down, and taken up for dead, he raged like a madman. He stamped, he swore; grew red, nay, purple, in the face; and quite incoherent in his speech, the first words almost choking him. Everybody had been to blame, himself excepted, so he anathematized everybody accordingly; and this whilst he was looking for his hat, which lay under his

hand, only he was far too much agitated to realize the fact.

It was his brisk little, black-eyed wife who at last found it for him, and patted him quite caressingly on the shoulder, spite of his fierce looks and words.

"If we had had a son of our own, he could not have loved him better than he does that man," with a little sigh, as she watched him stride along the avenue, flourishing his stick as if it were the famous sword that, like that of Damocles, hung over their bed.

By the time he reached the Cottage, he had both walked and worked himself up into a furious heat. So threatening, indeed, was his appearance, that poor little Mr. Lane, who, opening suddenly his hall door, met him face to face, started back in alarm.

"Is he dead, sir?" That was his first question, coming at once to the point.

No, Carlton Rickharts was not dead; he lay just as he had lain throughout the night. There had been no sign of a return

to consciousness, or even life, but he was not dead.

On hearing this, a look quivered over the weather-beaten face that softened it wonderfully, and it was in quite a mild, not to say broken, voice that he asked to see him.

But the doctor had left strict orders that no one was to be admitted. He had no hope, none; but whilst life lasted, every chance should be given him, and nobody was to be admitted.

“Nobody!” fired up the colonel more hotly than ever. “You don’t mean to say, I suppose, that I am anybody—eh?”

Mr. Lane did look upon him as somebody certainly, viz. as a very choleric, excitable old gentleman, about the last who should be admitted into the sick-room; but he only repeated what he had before said about the necessity of perfect quiet.

“Quiet!” burst forth the choleric old gentleman, the bushy brows meeting, the iron-grey moustache actually bristling

as at some personal attack. "Quiet! Is it in human nature to be quiet when such things are done—when such a man as that is shot down like a wild beast? Sir, I knew him from his cradle; wasn't a finer fellow living. I——" But a certain something was rising from his heart to his throat, threatening once more to choke him, so he wisely held his tongue; and when at last he did venture to speak again, it was in so mild and subdued a tone that Mr. Lane, fairly won over, did in the end admit him to the sick-room, where he behaved in quite an exemplary manner, treading as softly as any sick-nurse, and even hushing the heavy breathing that might have disturbed its silence.

He did not remain many minutes. He walked straight up to the bed, and stood there, erect and stiff, until something, that might have been tears had they been allowed to fall, came between him and the white, stern, rigid face, and prevented his seeing it clearly. Then he raised one of

the pale, strong hands lying on the counterpane, held it awhile in both his own, laid it down, very gently, and walked quietly out of the room and down the stairs and to the hall door, where he suddenly faced round upon Mr. Lane, who was following him at a respectful distance.

His face was redder than it had ever been before ; as red as any human face could be, unless its owner were threatened with an immediate attack of apoplexy. Every feature worked convulsively, his breast heaved. It was easy enough to see that the brave colonel was in a towering passion, and would have given worlds to explode then and there.

Mr. Lane glanced nervously around, perhaps for some means of escape. Too late ! The honourable member for Didford strode up to him, seized him, not by the collar but by the lappet of his coat, made two or three ineffectual attempts to speak, glared down upon him menacingly, then thundered out an eruptive " Good morning,

sir," and was gone before he had recovered from his surprise and alarm.

Rachel, seated by the window, behind the shadow of the curtain, watched him stalk along the drive. Herself unnoticed, she had seen him enter the room, go up to the bed, look at the lifeless face, hold the lifeless hand, almost as she herself had done; and her heart warmed to the rough old soldier.

"There is one, at least, who was true to him, who was fond of him, and will be sorry when he is dead!" was her grateful, womanly thought.

The next to call was Mrs. Treherne. Sitting at breakfast that morning, at an hour at which more than half the day's work would at one time have been got over, leisurely sipping her coffee, and reading her letters (if her friends were to be counted by the number of her correspondents, the little woman was as well off in them as in most other things), a knock came to the door, timid but urgent, and in the doorway

appeared a face—a white, miserable face surmounted by a pair of glistening spectacles.

Agatha recognized Mr. Mayne, foreman at the Works, and bade him welcome with the most gracious smile, but at the same time added hurriedly, “ Mr. Treherne is in London, you know, and I don’t expect him home to-day. Have you anything particular to say ? ”

Anything particular ! Would he otherwise have been there ? Had he ever before been known to absent himself from his desk, to leave it during working hours ? Would he have taken so desperate a step unless driven to it ? What he had to say was, that the manager had been shot down, and was now lying, between life and death, at the Cottage.

Agatha clasped her hands, and gave a sharp cry, as if she had herself received a blow, and were in bodily pain. Then she hurried off to the Cottage, repeating to herself over and over again as she went—



“ It can’t be true—it can’t ! He, so cool, so courageous, so dauntless, who would have dared to attack him ! ”

She was shown into the drawing-room, and presently Rachel came in. She recognized in her at once the pretty, bright-faced girl who had more than once excited her admiration, and interest too, as being connected with Carlton Treherne.

She was neither pretty nor bright now, however. Smiles, and dimples, and the warm blood flashing through the dark, pallid skin, all this was needed to make of Rachel Raye a beauty. Now there was neither smile nor colour in her face ; the great brown eyes were heavy, and the pale lips, firmly set, wore an expression the reverse of soft or pleasant.

Mrs. Treherne was the first to speak ; to express her sorrow, and make anxious inquiries. Rachel said very little, not a word more than was absolutely necessary ; Mrs. Treherne said very much.

“ And is there really no hope ? How

dreadful ! I don't know how Mr. Treherne will bear the news ; it will be such a blow to him ! I shall telegraph to him at once, and for a London doctor. If only something could be done to save him ! If it had been an ordinary illness—but a murder ! Who could have done it ! ”

And Rachel answered—quite unfeelingly, as Mrs. Treherne thought—“ What did it matter ? If he was to die, what did it matter by whose hand he fell ? ”

When she expressed a regret that he had not been taken to Treherne, there to be watched over by John and herself, and die in his old home, Miss Raye, in the same cold, unpleasant tone, remarked—

“ *I found him, and I brought him here ; it was nearer than any other house.* ” In her heart she added—“ I was once nearer to him than ever you could be ; and he might just as well die with his old love watching over him, as in the ‘ old home ’ of which you and yours have robbed him. ”

Agatha then begged very hard to be allowed to nurse him.

“You can’t do it all yourself; and Mrs. Lane is away. I am sure I could be of use. I nursed John through all his illness, you know. He had no one but me.” This she said so softly and prettily that it was a wonder Rachel could resist her; but she did. And more hard-hearted even than Uncle Joe, she not only refused her help, but even refused to let her into the sick-room.

“How unkind she is; how hard and unsympathetic!” pouted Agatha, almost crying with grief and disappointment, as she turned slowly away from the house. She had so counted upon being of use to him. Hitherto strong, proud, and independent, he had coldly rejected every offer of help; but now that he lay utterly helpless, he could not refuse her care and devotion. She had generously resolved to devote herself to him night and day—her care should save him as it had saved John. He had scorned to accept any return for

all that he had done—and, indeed, what adequate return could be made for so great a sacrifice? but now, at least, she would be everything to him, friend and sister and nurse. She was so sorry for him. It would have been such a comfort to exert herself in his behalf—to prove that she was not ungrateful, that she had not forgotten the old days when she had suffered so much, and he had been so good to her.

The tears that had been gathering fell thick and fast. It was so hard upon her—so cruel, so unjust! She almost hated at that moment the dark, slight girl with the great brown eyes she had once thought so beautiful, and the brusque, unpleasant manner.

How was it that Rachel had behaved so badly to her? Was it because she had shown an interest in Carlton Rickharts. So had the old colonel; and she would have thrown her arms round his neck and given him a good hug, had such a thing been allowable. Was it because Mrs. Treherne

was young and pretty, and she was jealous of her interference? Or was it that she resented involuntarily upon her, as a Treherne, the wrong that had been done him? She had merely acted upon impulse, as she generally did; but as she crept back again to the sick-room, she muttered, with a passionate throbbing at her heart, and a quick catching of the breath—

“She shall not nurse him; and she shall not take him away from me. She has everything else, everything that was once his. I found him, and God alone shall take him from me!”

## CHAPTER XII.

HAVING received the telegram, John Treherne hurried up from London, and so did a certain eminent physician. But, meanwhile, an important change had taken place in the condition of the patient. The wound having again been dressed, he had awoke to consciousness, but in a high fever.

"Is there any hope?" Rachel asked of the London physician, who was so very soft, and amiable, and courtly.

He looked at her with some little curiosity, and some little interest too. He himself was middle-aged and grey, and before growing grey had been flaxen, for which reason, perhaps, a dark face had always for him a peculiar attraction, more

especially when it happened to be a young and pretty one.

"Your brother?" he asked sympathizingly, and with the sweetest of smiles, still holding, unconsciously, no doubt, the hand she had given him at parting.

The little hand fluttered, and the eyes into which he was looking drooped; she blushed too, vividly, which was no unusual thing with her, but it greatly heightened the attraction of her face.

She explained that he was no relation; she had found him quite by chance, and brought him to the house.

"Ah, yes. To be sure. I understand," urbanely. And he did understand, perfectly. In pity to her he did not say what he thought, but she read it in his look and voice.

For several days the fever raged; and Rachel watched and waited, not for any improvement, but for the end. She had the sick-room more than ever to herself now, for she had not Uncle Joe to look after, Aunt Mary having returned.

The poor old cousin had rallied in a manner that was little less than miraculous, and bade fair to be as well and strong as ever, except, indeed, in the matter of her memory, which was gone; but, as the doctor cheerfully observed, "her recovery would be all the more speedy and complete for that!" And he had further assured her anxious relative "that her general health would probably now be better than it had ever been before; so that there was no reason, no reason at all, why she should not live for the next twenty years at least." This was highly satisfactory to all parties. It would entail an increase of pension, as without memory she could not take care of herself; and there was a heavy doctor's and chemist's bill to be met; but to be assured that the respected cousin whom she had come to bury would, in all probability, outlive herself and her husband, must have been very gratifying to Mrs. Lane's feelings, and she would have returned home in high spirits had it not been for the dreadful news



she had received; not by telegram—Uncle Joe knew better than to prepare her such a shock—but from a long, full, and circumstantial account contained in a letter. It is doubtful whether, had she been on the spot, the best spare bedroom would have been sacrificed to the cause of humanity; but it having been thus sacrificed, she submitted to fate, and did not turn the manager out.

Had it been a Treherne who lay there she would have deemed it an honour and a privilege, the greatest that could fall to her lot (as, with all her loyalty, she might never dare hope to receive her gracious Majesty the Queen or any of the Royal family). It being only a Mr. Rickharts, she felt less elated, but not less pitiful. What she could do she did; but it was not much, in the way of nursing, at least—that she could not quite manage, somehow. Had it been Uncle Joe who was ill she would have made him a capital nurse, no doubt—the instincts of love are really wonderful; but he had

never suffered from anything worse than an occasional cold, which gruel and a foot-bath had cured. Her sole experience of a sick-room, therefore, had been that of the poor old cousin, where, in the awe-inspiring presence of a professed nurse, she dared not venture an opinion, much less a suggestion.

Now, feeling so very sorry and so utterly helpless, she could only talk; repeat again and again that she had known the young man from a child, and had always a motherly feeling for him. But try as she might, she could not prevent the door creaking every time she opened it, which was what it had never done before so long as it had been a door; or her dress rustling; or every cup and spoon and bottle she carried in, rattling and jingling as they never did at any other time.

She rather doubted the propriety of Rachel's being allowed to nurse a male patient—though, to be sure, it was quite the fashionable thing for a young lady to do nowadays—and so she proposed having in a

professed nurse ; but was almost tearful in her gratitude when the offer was indignantly refused. What an escape ! A professed nurse at the Cottage, turning it upside down, and in and out. Could it ever afterwards have been to her like home ?

The day had been an oppressively hot one. Never before had Rachel found any summer day so long and so oppressive ; and when at last the sun set she was glad, for then a cool breeze, blowing over the hills, found its way into the sick-room, to him, and her. Worn out with the heat and the day's watching, she now sat by the open window, her head leant back against the frame—not sleeping, not even thinking, only looking out and enjoying the delicious breeze that was lifting the brown hair from her aching forehead and that had even reached the bed curtains, swaying them gently to and fro. She heard the faint sound of their rustling, and smiled with a deep sigh of content. His sleep must be more calm, more pleasant, with that cool, soft air moving about him.

So deep was that sleep and hushed, that for the first time for many days her presence there was not needed. There was nothing for her to do. She had been constantly beside him, moistening his lips and forehead, giving him to drink, interpreting each unconscious movement—but he slept now, had slept throughout the long, hot day, and Aunt Mary had tried to persuade her to have a run with Klint. She looked as if she needed fresh air. But some new, vague feeling was at work in her heart. She might not have to nurse him much longer now; at least, she would not have him much longer to herself. She would watch by him till he awoke.

That morning, for the first time, the doctor had given hope. His having fallen asleep was a good sign. If that sleep could be long and quiet, and he awoke conscious, all danger would be over—all immediate danger, at least; and it was to keep it quiet and undisturbed that she had stayed at home and watched by him throughout the

long, hot summer day. Hour after hour he had slept on, and nothing had come to disturb him.

As she now sat at the open window, it seemed to her as if nature itself were watching with her, and waiting. All was so quiet. Down below, in the garden, Mr. and Mrs. Lane were making their usual evening tour, stopping every now and then at certain familiar points, which they were accustomed not to pass without stopping. Their voices did not reach the sick-room, but Rachel knew exactly what they were saying; for they had said the same thing on the same spot, at the same hour, for the last thirty years. Thirty years ago! Why, they were then a young couple, just come together; and now they were old, and together still. In thirty years she would be old, and alone. And time went so quickly! Once, not so very long ago either, it had seemed to her that she never could grow old; now she could quite fancy herself old, and alone too. Oh that delicious breeze; its slow,

soft movement over her hair! From the branches of a tree, somewhere near, a bird chirped and twittered—in its dreams, perhaps; for with the silence, shadows were falling over the earth, and all quiet, well-disposed birds had long since retired. That would not disturb his sleep, however, any more than the breeze.

The roll of carriage-wheels, the sharp clang of horses' hoofs on the hard road. The Trehernes returning from their evening drive. Rachel sprang up nervously. If only they would pass the gate without stopping to make inquiries. Why should they? He was nothing to them. If he died, they would be sorry; if he lived, they would be glad. But they would be happy, perfectly happy, without him. She had come upon them in the park an evening or so before, walking arm-in-arm, as usual, so bright and happy—laughing, too; yes, actually laughing—and he lay dying. The doctor had given no hope then. It was all very well for them to call in and make their

daily formal inquiry, and look sorry and anxious, but she did not want them that evening.

The carriage-wheels rolled smoothly and briskly by. She had her wish, they did not stop at the gate; but, woman-like, though relieved, she resented their apparent neglect. "So alone," she murmured. "Nobody but me." Then she turned her head slightly towards the bed. The soft, evening air was playing in the curtains, waving them to and fro.

Watching, as she had done for so many days without hope, she had kept up bravely; been bright and cheerful throughout, spite of sleepless nights and other trifling inconveniences. It was in her nature to be both the one and the other, and not at all in her nature to be downhearted or despondent; but now, when for the first time a hope had been given her, she found it quite a hard matter not to give way. She couldn't help the feeling; her heart was full of sad thoughts, solemn and tender, that turned

unconsciously to prayer, as evening and shadows deepened.

By-and-by Mrs. Lane came in on tiptoe, boots and door both creaking, and the cautious step and whisper more painfully audible than the heaviest tread or loudest tone would have been.

“Supper is ready, dear. Won’t you come down? Jane will take your place, you know.”

“Not just yet, aunty ; I am not hungry. I have a headache, and the room is so cool and quiet.”

Quiet enough, when good Aunt Mary was gone, quiet as if no living thing were there ; as if there were nothing of life to stir it but that wandering breeze, still blowing in through the open window, and the solemn, tender thoughts with which the girl’s heart was full.

There was more of shadow than light about it, when at last its silence was broken by the voice that no one ever thought to hear again. Rachel did not start on hearing



it ; but, with that shadow of solemn thought and prayer still lying in her eyes, rose quietly, and went up to the bedside.

“ Was he awake ? ”

Hardly as yet, for his eyes were closed ; she could see that, the outline of the face showing sharp and white amid the surrounding shadows. She stood quite still within the curtain, which waved softly to and fro, with a faint sound of movement.

Again Carlton Rickharts stirred, slightly, then suddenly stretched up his right arm from the coverlet with a quick, tremulous gesture. He spoke again, too—only one word, but she caught it.

“ Mother.”

Once before, in his strong, independent life, he had awoke from the fevered sleep that was to give him back to life from death, and then it was his mother who had stood beside him, and it was upon her face that his eyes had opened.

Rachel laid her hand on the eager, outstretched arm, and sighed.

His eyes still closed, he turned, involuntarily, as it were, towards the sound, and he whispered in the sharp, half petulant tone of the boy whose will had been law—"Kiss me."

It was for the mother's kiss he asked; and Rachel, that solemn shadow of thought and prayer still lying over her face, stooped down over his, and kissed him.

She heard how he drew a deep, hard breath; then the arm that had so long lain powerless, closed about her, strained her to him with all the old strength and passion, and dropped heavily back upon the coverlet.

When she raised her face, whiter almost than his own, and drew slowly back, she saw that he had again fallen asleep.

## CHAPTER XIII.

It is strange how very differently two persons will judge of the same matter. Miss Raye was ready to quarrel with Squire Treherne for showing too little feeling for the man who, through him, had lost everything; and Agatha, though so much the more amiable and soft-hearted woman of the two, was *almost* ready, in thought at least, to quarrel with him for showing too much. It was not that she was jealous of her husband. She was not jealous of his affection for the disreputable, imbecile old "grandfather"—for so they both still called him—extravagant and contemptible though many had pronounced it; nor even of the delicate attentions now showered upon him

by the titled beauties who were, one and all, so eager to claim relationship and strike up a friendship with the fair, handsome, dreamy student cousin, whose eyes, and smile, and voice, and auburn locks, and delightful romantic story made of him quite an exceptional being. But she was tempted at times to think that he carried his loyal attachment to Carlton Rickharts rather too far. Nobody could be more sorry for him, poor fellow, than she had been. Had she not offered to nurse him, and even shed some bitter tears on her offer being refused? She would have been so glad to devote herself to him, and bring him round; but she really did not see why John should take the matter so to heart, refusing to be comforted, even by her, or why he should persist in blaming himself for the accident.

“As if you could have anything to do with it,” she would say, shaking her pretty head, and arguing the matter out like the sensible little woman that she was. “It was not to serve you personally, I am sure,

that he became manager; and as to that wretched Bates"—for that delectable youth having had his revenge, or, rather, proved his malice, had betrayed himself by his ashen looks and tottering limbs, and was now in jail awaiting his trial—"you warned him long ago not to take him into the Works, but he neglected your advice, and you see what has come of it."

She was rather proud of her hero's foresight and penetration; but all the satisfaction she got was a despondent sigh, and the regret again repeated. "That strong, noble life so wickedly cut off. If he dies I shall never forgive myself."

The day came, however, when Carlton Rickharts was declared out of danger; and John Treherne calling, was admitted.

He found the patient alone, the brown-eyed Cerberus, who had so long and so jealously guarded the door, having given up her watch. Poor, ill-used patient! Now that he had been dragged back to life, and alive, once more to outward impressions, the

devoted attentions of his pretty nurse might have amused as well as gratified him—for he was already heartily sick, if not of his own company, at least of the miserable weakness that kept him a helpless prisoner—he was quite deserted, for the greater part of the day at any rate. In the evening, when all chance of visitors was over, she would come stealing in with Aunt Mary and twilight, and give him half an hour; but what was that, when the hours of day and night were so long and so many?

“I began to think I was never to be admitted—that I was never to be allowed to see you again,” John Treherne said, as he received into both his own the once mighty hand, now powerless almost as that of a child, and held it lightly and lovingly as if it were something precious. And then the blue eyes filled, and the lip quivered with emotion. He longed to say more, much more, of all that he had felt and was feeling still, but the other’s cool unconcern, and cold, impassive look imposed upon and

silenced him, as regarded his feelings at least.

“The doctor’s orders were very strict, I believe. I must have had a bad time of it, though I know very little about it.”

“I have called here every day, and so has Agatha, but Miss Raye never admitted us further than the door.”

“Miss Raye——”

“Agatha wanted to nurse you. She had quite set her heart upon it, but Miss Raye——”

“Said that it was all nonsense, and wouldn’t hear of it, I suppose. Well, I have managed to pull through without nursing, you see. Leave a fellow alone, and if he doesn’t die he’ll live.” Then he turned the conversation, with an effort. He could not speak for long together as yet, but he wished to hear no more of Miss Raye or his own illness.

That same evening, with Mrs. Lane and the twilight, Rachel came in and brought him his tea.

How she could contrive to carry the tray, and a full one too, from the door to the bed without letting anything jar and jingle, was what Aunt Mary never could understand.

As she now stood at the bedside, and having poured in the cream and put in the one lump of sugar (since that evening, now so long ago, when she had made tea for him at the farm she had never forgotten the exact proportion that suited his taste), held it close up to his lips—for he was incapable as yet of doing much for himself, at least when she was by—he looked at her curiously and intently.

Of this, of course, she was well aware, though apparently quite unconscious of it, and wholly absorbed in her occupation.

“It seems a fine evening. You have been out?” He wished her to look up at him, but she did not.

“Oh yes, for hours, Klint and I. I should not have been in now, but that I knew you would be wanting your tea. It was such a glorious sunset—such a wonderful evening



sky. You could see it from the window if you were to raise yourself a little——”

“With the help of your arm.”

“Aunt Mary’s would be more support.”

“I prefer yours.”

She held it out, trying hard to take it as a matter of course, and look perfectly indifferent; but a smile would come and hover about her lips, which smile provoked Carlton Rickharts, who, to revenge himself, perhaps, made more use of the proffered support than was altogether necessary.

Having raised himself sufficiently to look out of the window, he did not do so, but looked at her instead. She was busy about his curtains, looping them back, and he was following her movements.

“That’s a pretty rose you have in your belt.”

She laughed. “I gathered it just to tease Uncle Joe. He never lets any one take from that tree; but he couldn’t scold me.”

He put out his hand and drew it slowly from her waist.

She only laughed again; she was still busy with the curtains, and inclined to humour him. "You may have it," she said carelessly. "I can easily get another."

He held it to him a moment, looking at it and inhaling its perfume; it was wonderfully sweet. Then he let it drop on to the coverlet with a cold, listless gesture.

"I don't want it; you may take it back. Better keep it for the purpose for which it was picked. In half an hour its beauty and scent will be gone, and it will be worthless; but whilst fresh, it looks very well in your waist." Then he turned to the wall, as though weary or dissatisfied.

For awhile she lingered about him still, anything but pleased at being thus tacitly dismissed. She had come to spend with him the prescribed half-hour, and he had hardly borne with her company half that time.

Having by nature more perhaps than the usual share of feminine perverseness, she was now seized with an eager wish to stay,

simply because he seemed to wish her gone. He would not speak or look at her, but she would not leave the room just yet for all that. So she went away quietly and stood by the open window, leaving the rose where it lay. All wish to tease Uncle Joe, or even Carlton Rickharts himself, was now quite gone.

Standing at the window, she watched the clouds floating slowly under the deep grey evening sky, and the stars as they shone out one by one, now here, now there. Then slowly, from behind a silvery bank of cloud, the moon came out, the full harvest moon, and shone upon her—upon her uplifted face and folded hands. Hers was a figure to look particularly well in the moonlight—slight, and visionary rather, when seen thus from a distance; the shadowy brown hair, and the still more shadowy eyes, the pale face, and sharp, delicate features that made such a much prettier picture when seen *en profile*. That glorious harvest moon—how beautiful it was! But how little she sym-

pathized with its cold, calm, mysterious splendour that made her heart throb and ache.

She little guessed that Carlton Rickharts was admiring the moonlight with her, but only as reflected on her face. He had turned back again from the wall, thinking that she had left the room; then he saw her where she stood by the open window, the white, solemn light on her face and hands.

After a time he called to her, finding the silence, and the distance she had placed between them, oppressive.

“Miss Raye, why did you turn everybody from the door when I was ill? And why did you not let Agatha Treherne nurse me when she wished to?”

Rachel, not expecting him to look at or speak to her again that evening, was startled rather at the sound of his voice, and found the question a difficult one to answer. She murmured something about “only obeying the doctor’s orders.”

"I can't hear what you say. I have so often now a singing in my ears. Would you come nearer? It hurts me to speak loud."

She felt sorry for him when he spoke of his weakness, and went nearer.

"And it was to obey the doctor's orders, I suppose, that you never came near me yourself; that I see so little of you now?"

Again she started, and the red blood flushed up over her face. And so he did not know that it was she who had nursed him, night and day, from first to last? He could never take advantage of the devotion that had been shown to the *sufferer*, not the *man*, because he would never know of it. She need not be afraid of him now, or of herself either. Her eyes lighted up, her lips wreathed themselves in smiles and dimples. She knelt down by the bed, leant her elbow on it, and her chin on her hand.

"The doctor said that only perfect quiet could save you. I thought that the fewer you had about you the better. I hate people about me when I am ill."

He looked at her awhile in silence. She answered his look at first, then finding it too deep, and hardly knowing what to make of it, laughed a shy little laugh, grew first red, then pale, and played abstractedly with the white rose that still lay on the counterpane.

"You think that it keeps me quiet, to leave me alone all day?"

"The doctor said so."

"The doctor be h—— If you want me to get well soon, and off your hands, shall I tell you what you must do?"

"Send for Mrs. Treherne," with a side-long glance of the brown eyes, and a slow uplifting of the white rose to the queer, dainty little nose.

He was terribly near saying, "Mrs. Treherne be hanged," which would have shocked Miss Raye dreadfully; but he checked himself, and left poor Agatha out of the question.

"You must come to me oftener, and stay longer."

"But Aunt Mary——"

"Can do very well without you, and so can the old gentleman. I can't."

"But you mustn't talk."

"I don't want to talk; but I don't want to think too much either. I want to see you sitting in that window, with your work or book, or Master Klint himself, if you can't be happy without him."

"It was he who found you," very softly. And the white rose fluttered to the girl's lips, its petals stirred by their light, tremulous breath.

"It won't be for many more days that I shall want you. But if you wish to keep me quiet, and help me to get strong, you must stay away altogether, or come oftener."

"I was afraid of disturbing you."

"So you have, often enough. I hear you laughing and singing in the garden, and it irritates me."

"I am so sorry. I did not think you could hear me."

“ But I do.”

“ And Uncle Joe, and Aunt Mary, and the gardener? How dreadful it must be!” Of course, it could not be only her laugh and voice and singing that disturbed him.

Did she really misunderstand him? When he next spoke his voice was changed; it was sharp and abrupt, and had in it a ring of suffering, probably physical.

“ Will you do as I bid you? Will you come to me, and sing here, where I can see as well as hear you? Will you, Rachel?”

It was the second time only, in all their long acquaintance and mutual love-making, that he had called her by her name. He himself was not aware of it. He had spoken more than was good for him, and the last words had been got out with actual physical pain; he would not, therefore, be likely to use one more word than was absolutely necessary.

She made him no promise; and there was a half mocking smile on her face. She could not help its coming there, any more



than she could help the impulse that made her press the white rose to her bosom, and hold it there under her two folded hands.

He expected a laugh, or a sharp, saucy answer ; but he got neither, and he could not see her face, for the moon had gone down behind that silver bank of cloud, and so darkness had fallen between them.

## CHAPTER XIV.

It is an acknowledged fact that justice is very seldom done to the living. And to the dead? Well, they might be satisfied could they return just at the nick of time, before the momentary fever of emotion is over, and men have had leisure to forget. Then indeed, brought back on to the stage of life from which they had dropped, in all probability, worn out with a hopeless struggle, they would exclaim, "See what a great man I was, after all. I had but to die to live, according to my ambitious dream, in the thoughts of men. The whole world is full of me!" To-day yes—and to-morrow? Your name will be found on your tombstone, and in one or two faithful hearts, maybe.

Centuries hence you may be dug up again from the burial-place of the past, and live once more as some curious fossil or mummy, or long-exploded type, dear to the connoisseur, but hardly interesting to the world in general.

Mr. Rickharts had not actually died and been buried, but he had been too near having an inquest held on his body not to rise in importance, and become a person well worth talking of and being run after.

Thousands have been to see Pepper's Ghost—thousands to see the "Claimant." Even the spot where a murder, or accident, or tragedy of any kind has been enacted, is visited by eager crowds. Nearly all Didford and the country around for miles would, no doubt, have turned out to look on Jim Bates' ugly face; but he was safe behind the prison walls, and only Carlton Rickharts, the victim of his crime, was left to them.

There was nothing much to see in him, decidedly less than when he had last appeared in public; for fever and loss of

blood had reduced him rather, and certainly not improved his personal appearance.

All the county, moved by a common impulse, went, or sent, to the Cottage.

“Well, to be sure—to be sure!” said Mrs. Lane, gratified but wondering. “Whoever would have thought of their making such a fuss about him!”

Carlton Rickharts submitted to be made a fuss about with characteristic *sang-froid*. He did not see that being shot down and rendered a helpless burden upon his friends was a particularly meritorious act, calculated to raise him in public opinion. He had done better things than that, which had been overlooked; but there is no accounting for the vagaries of public favour; and if Squire Puffer and Lord D—— derived any satisfaction from their assiduous inquiries after his health, he did not grudge it them in the least.

One of the first to be admitted when all danger was over, and Rachel had resigned her jealous watch, was Colonel Beverley;

and though he blustered, and stormed, and said some very wicked things, and made use of some very wicked words, his visit, on the whole, did the patient more good than harm.

After that he came daily; and one afternoon, finding him not only down, but in the orchard under the great pear tree, up which poor Harry had climbed to bring down for Miss Raye the coveted fruit—for the man's splendid constitution helping him, he had in the last few days made rapid strides—the colonel insisted, looking very fierce and red about the face and neck, that so soon as he could be moved without risk, he should go to Beverley House, there to complete his cure by being bullied by himself, and nursed by Mrs. Beverley.

Carlton Rickharts liked little Mrs. Beverley better than most women. He admired the bright, black eyes, and brisk, sprightly manner. She would not oppress or fidget him, and it would greatly conduce to his recovery to be able to vent on his old friend the colonel all the ill-humour that

had been accumulating, and that could have no safe or healthy vent in the model cottage; for he respected the tottering frailness of the old woman who kept it for him, and of the furniture which groaned and shivered as if in mortal terror of his superior strength, and seemed ready at any moment to break together under his heavy touch. He did not say Yes to the colonel's offer, but he did not say No; and when the erect, martial figure had taken itself off, he lay, his head supported on his hand, looking up into the giant branches, and thinking—pleasantly at first—for who would not be amused at the old gentleman's eccentricities?—then a dark cloud gathered suddenly over the massive brow, and he uttered a sharp, impatient exclamation. He had been looking into the future, and he could not see as far or as clearly as he would have wished. That cowardly blow had shaken more than his constitution; it had for the first time shaken his faith in himself and his destiny.

From his very childhood, strong in his sense of power, mental and physical, he had believed himself safe because invulnerable: The blow that, falling so unexpectedly, had involved shame and ruin, and would have crushed many another man, had only made him all the more strong to suffer and to do. Nothing daunted, he had faced ruin and defied it. But that murderous thrust in the dark, when defence was impossible, and from so mean and once despised an enemy; the long insensibility, the slow return to life and reason, the pain, the utter helplessness, had shaken the very foundation upon which his fortunes were to be built up. He was not invulnerable; for once neither physical nor moral power had availed him anything. The weak schoolmaster had resisted and defied the rebellious bully, and had remained victor; whilst he, opposing, had been struck down by him. Though the boldest among the disaffected workmen had not dared dispute his will by even a word; he, the miserable coward, who dared

not meet his eye, had recklessly risked his life in order to take that of the man who had found him out, and exposed him. A random shot from an unskilled hand, and he had fallen to the earth, to be picked up by the first chance passer by—which happened to be a dog. Ha! there he was, and his mistress, coming through the orchard gate.

He had not seen Rachel before, that day; he had spent the morning in his room, the afternoon with the colonel; and she had been away with Klint for several hours, nobody knew where. Now that he spent his evenings in the drawing-room, he found her there, very pretty and bright always, and quite willing to make herself agreeable. She wore all her most becoming fashionable London dresses by turns, laughed a good deal, and looked her very best. Also, as she made it a rule to sing to Uncle Joe, who was quite foolish about her voice, in the soft, summer twilight, he had the pleasure of hearing her, and of seeing her too, the piano standing just opposite the



armchair that had been given up to him ; and Rachel never looked better than when seated at the piano, with Klint lying at her feet, and the twilight around her — the soft, undefined outlines of the slight figure, the sharp, clear outline of the girlish face, the colour that came and went according to the feeling she put into her song. Singing, too, she forgot herself entirely ; that she was young and pretty, and very anxious, under certain circumstances, to excite interest and attention.

Looking at the slight figure, and the girlish face, than which none had ever seemed to him more lovable and attractive, thoughts, strange and good and beautiful, had crept into the man's heart, and fired the man's brain—momentarily only ; flashes of intense, and hitherto unknown, feeling, betrayed in his looks always, but never in his words—thoughts of a woman's influence in her home. Rachel interpreted his looks in the manner most pleasing to herself ; as to words, she said over and over again that

he must not speak—he must not repeat what he had once said. She would not marry him, or any one else, now papa had come back to her; and she would not have him ask her for what she could not, or would not, give. It would be dreadful if he were to propose to her, and she were to—refuse him. At the very thought, her heart seemed to stand still, and grow cold and dead.

As she now, coming through the orchard gate, saw Carlton Rickharts lying beneath the old pear tree, leaning on his elbow, and his face turned from her, she started, all the more violently because she had been thinking of him, and nothing else, for the last—— Well, she had a beautiful little watch that her father had bought for her in Paris, but she had got over the first childish pleasure of constantly referring to it; and time ceases to be of importance when you live in the present, and do not care to look beyond.

She had had a very pleasant walk, a very

merry one too ; running races with Klint, singing all her favourite songs to him and the birds, only pausing now and then to smile to herself and blush. Never was air more balmy, never was sky brighter ; all seemed to laugh and rejoice with her. Sky and birds, and air and flowers, all seemed to share in her excitement, to be full of life and warmth, and eager, restless throbbings.

“Papa will be here to-morrow, Klint,” she had said to that favoured friend and confidant, as if in apology for her unusually high spirits ; but it was not of papa she was thinking when she smiled and blushed, and sang over and over again, and each time more softly, more passionately, the one song that was *not* one of Mr. Raye’s especial favourites.

Seeing Carlton Rickharts beneath the pear tree, she stopped short. It was very pleasant to have him in the drawing-room of an evening ; to sing to him, and know she gave him pleasure ; to pour out his tea, and arrange his cushions ; to hover about

him, and even, when not talking to, or thinking of him, to feel his presence, through her whole frame, through every nerve; but she did not wish to find herself alone with him. If he had the chance he would speak, and that would be such a pity! This evening was his last chance; to-morrow papa would be back, and she would have little time to devote to anybody but him. To-night was their last chance of being together—alone.

She stopped short, and looked at him from under the broad brim of her hat. His face was turned from her—he had not seen her yet. She could easily pass out again through the gate, and get home by the wood, where she and Klint had found him. Would he turn and see her? Her heart was beating very fast, and her colour came and went as she stood there undecided, her hand upon the gate.

Since she had become a fashionable young lady with good prospects, she had learnt to reason and calculate; only, un-

fortunately, her impulses often proved stronger than her calculations, and led her into acts of which reason would have disapproved.

“Perhaps if she were to walk on very quietly he would not notice her, or if he did she would throw him a look and word in passing; that could not lead to anything. She was not afraid of him or herself, only he must not speak. After to-night she would feel safe, for this was their last chance of being *alone together*.”

She did walk on very quietly, and he did not notice her; indeed, she might have got safely home, and been none the worse for his dangerous vicinity, had she not all at once, impulse again getting the better of reason, fell to humming the last verse of the song that had been haunting her all the afternoon.

Then, of course, Mr. Rickharts, raising himself higher on his elbow, looked round and saw her.

She threw him a look and smile and

word, or rather, half a dozen; and then, as he did not seek to detain her, or even appear anxious in any way for her to stay, she slowly approached, and came and stood beside him.

He did not look particularly dangerous as he lay there, his eyes, cold and careless, uplifted to her face; and standing thus, of her own free choice, close beside him, her fears vanished. It was pleasanter out there in the orchard than in the drawing-room. Tea would not be ready yet, or Uncle Joe in; and Aunt Mary, though a dear good creature, was—rather a bore.

“Have you been here long?” she asked, by way of saying something.

“I don’t know, I’m sure. Unless busy, with certain hours marked out, I never calculate time. I like to forget that there are such things as clocks and watches. I think our life would seem twice as long if there were no hours and days and months and years to remind us of its flight.”

This sounded more philosophical, surely,

than lover-like, and he was not even looking at her now, but straight down on the earth, pulling up a long grass and turning it absently about his fingers.

“Isn’t this a dear old tree?” she said again, presently, moved by the same irresistible impulse that was leading her further and further astray. “I was always so fond of it. There was only one that I loved still better, the great oak in the park. Do you remember?”

He looked up at her as she said this, and again her heart beat fast, and her colour came and went.

“You were lying beneath it that evening I saw you in the park. *I* should never care to stand beneath it again.”

She was thinking of the changes that had come to both since then, and her voice dropped, low and tremulous as a sigh. He had risen whilst she spoke, and now leant against the tree. She still stood beside him, waiting for him to speak.

“I don’t trouble its shade much now ; it

lies too far off to be convenient. I never cared much to visit it after you left that summer."

"A—h."

"That was a glorious summer, I remember."

"Yes, a long, bright, glorious summer;" and unconsciously she drew a step nearer.

"And those were pleasant days, too pleasant to last. Nothing that is pleasant ever lasts for long."

"Yes, they were pleasant days," breathed out in a low, passionate undertone; and she looked up at him with wild, shy eyes that said so much, spite of reason and its silent promptings.

"Do you remember our adventure of the storm, and Cross's farm?"

"And the poor wounded hand. I remember."

"Which you bandaged up for me."

She smiled, and nestled closer. Since then he had been wounded again, nigh unto death, and again she had tended and



nursed him ; but of this he knew nothing, *must* know nothing.

He laughed, and held out to her the large, shapely hand, pointing to the scar which was still to be seen.

She bent her face down over it, so low that he felt the warm play of her breath as her lips almost touched it. They might have touched it quite, if impulse had been allowed to have its own way.

“ And our walk home through the wood. Do you know that the tree you rested on lies there still ? I saw it the last time I passed that way.”

She had seen it that very afternoon, and had sat, or rather crouched, down beside it, her arms tight clasped about the wood, damp and moss-grown though it was, smiling and dreaming, and unutterably happy ; until the song, that had been haunting her all the morning, or rather since on the previous evening he had told her that he liked it, and had made her sing it over again, came once more into her head,

and she fell to singing it, as an accompaniment to her thoughts. Nothing of all this she told him, however; she only answered him very demurely, "Oh, indeed," and bent down to reach Klint's head and stroke it.

"Shall I tell you of what I was thinking just before you came?"

He had lowered his voice somewhat, but its tone was still half careless, as if, in all he said, he was more in jest than earnest.

She tried hard to look unconscious and indifferent—to give him a saucy, defiant look; but the brown eyes got no further than his beard. Had the fatal moment come? Was he really going to speak at last? He stood very close, and he was looking at her; she knew that, though she dare not meet his eyes.

It would certainly be better for her to go; but she did nothing of the kind. On the contrary, she stood quite still, listening with her whole soul for what he would say next.

"I was thinking," very slowly, "how pleasant it would be to have Rachel Raye back again, as I knew her first, just for half an hour. She was only a child, it is true—a little girl fresh from the parish women and village school-children. But she suited me then, and—I think she would suit me even better now. I was often very angry with her, and she once behaved very badly to me—very badly indeed; but that was because she was jealous."

Jealous! Rachel looked up now, her eyes indignant, her cheeks burning. How could he—how dare he!

"It was not that I was jealous."

"You—no, I was not speaking of you, but of the child Rachel, who was jealous sometimes. Perhaps I liked her all the better for that, though; and I have sometimes thought, these last few days more especially, that I should be glad to have her back. It was of her I was thinking as you came up."

A pause. Was that all he had to say?

She would not encourage him—no, not even by a look. It might be as well, very much better, that she should not know of what he had been thinking. If he did not tell her now, she would never give him another opportunity. It was his last chance—and hers.

How interminable seemed the silence, that had, as it were, fallen over the whole earth, whilst she stood there waiting for him to speak!

He did not speak, however; and when he at last broke the silence, it was by whistling the air that was evidently haunting them both; and thrusting his hands into his pockets, he looked up absently into the great, crooked branches that stretched themselves above their heads.

Now was the auspicious moment for her to turn the conversation, and thus silence him for ever.

Instead—she turned away abruptly, dropped on one knee, drew Klint to her very closely, one arm about his neck, and looked up into Carlton Rickharts' face.

“What were you thinking about Rachel? I should like to know what you think of her now. I know what you thought then—that summer, I mean.”

He brought his eyes down from the high, crooked branches to the figure of the girl kneeling almost at his feet, and looking up at him as she asked the question.

“I have thought many and very different things about Rachel from first to last. Am I expected to tell you them all?”

She would have been so glad—oh, so glad!—to hear them all; every thought he had ever had about her, from the moment they had first met in Treherne Park up to the present moment, when he leant carelessly against the crooked old pear tree, and looked down on her smiling. But she only transferred her eyes and her apparent attention from him to Klint, and mischievous little smiles—things so much more dangerous than sentiment or pretty speeches—came creeping about her lips.

“No, not all; only just what you

were thinking of when I came to disturb you.”

He did not satisfy her at once, but stretched himself as if weary, drew a deep breath, half sigh, half yawn, and threw him-down on the ground beside her.

“I was tired of being an invalid—tired of being alone—tired of leaning on my elbow, and too lazy to get up and go home.” (Smiles brighter and more mischievous; quivering lids that longed to rise but dare not, for he was so near to her now—so very near.) “And, just as you came up, I was wondering whether, if Rachel—the old Rachel—were by, as near to me as you are now, for instance, and I were to tell her how weak and good for nothing I felt, and how hard a pillow the ground made, she would offer me a corner of her plaid, or a breadth of her skirt, as she once offered me her handkerchief to tie up my hand.”

Bright flashes of warm red that came and went over the girl's face, the lids quite downbent and quiet now, having no wish to

rise, and the smiles changing slowly in their expression. The man's look and tone had changed too, imperceptibly. He could hardly have spoken coldly or indifferently with that great longing throbbing at his heart to lay the weary head down on the woman's lap and feel her arms close about him. Why should they not? She had once loved him, and he had always loved her.

His elbows had already taken possession of the one breadth of her trailing skirt, and he was trying very hard to make her eyes meet his.

Faster and faster her colour came and went, and with it a rush of thoughts and feelings she had believed long since wrestled against and overcome. Troublesome, irrational, tumultuous, unexpected—what business had they there just then? The smiles with which she had once more lured him to her so irresistibly, so closely, that nothing lay between her and the passionate clasp of the strong arms—strong still to have and to hold, spite of pain and illness, but the in-

instinctive reserve felt by every man in the presence of the woman he really loves—were all gone; not the faintest shadow of one left.

“Do you think it possible, Rachel, to regain what has once been lost?”

He had lost so much—fortune, position, name; but she knew that it was not of these things he was thinking.

“No, I don’t.”

The answer was another of the reckless impulses that had so often marked her life. She rose abruptly, freeing herself by a sudden movement from the retaining clasp of the arms that had so nearly touched her, and moved aside, standing apart from and looking down on him.

“I never got back what was once lost. It is so dreadful to lose—so hard to bear—almost impossible, it seems at first. But if you don’t die, you learn to live without it; and then—if you could have it back again you wouldn’t, and if you would you couldn’t. It could never be the same thing again. What is lost, is lost for ever.”



She saw that he did not understand her. How should he? He had not suffered as she had. He had not wasted nearly two years of his life in feverish longings and repinings. He could afford to take up once more the recovered plaything so carelessly thrown aside ; but she had loved and been made unhappy by him.

“ I don’t quite understand you.”

“ I know you don’t. You never did ; not when we were so much together, and I told you everything. And every word I ever said to you was true. But you doubted and misjudged me ; you thought me interested and forward because I was, as you just now said, a mere child, and too happy and fond of you to play with your feelings or hide mine. You were right, I dare say.”

“ The only wrong I ever did was in letting you go from me ; but as things have turned out, it is as well, perhaps, that it should be so.”

He, too, had risen ; not, like Rachel, with a sudden bound, but with slow deliberate-

ness, and now stood before her, erect, observant, all the passion that had lain momentarily in his looks and words frozen back into cold impassiveness.

She felt that all was lost. She had not so long hung upon his every mood not to know what his looks meant. Once before, and at words of hers too, she had seen his face change as it was changing now, slowly hardening into cold, impassive sternness. Was it this that she had meant? Was this the end to which she had looked? With a few soft words, a few stray smiles and blushes, she might yet have won him back to her; but there are times when we have no more command over ourselves and our actions than we might have over any other convulsion of nature. A sudden, resistless impulse, a few rapid, passion-dictated words, the burden, it may be, of years of silent, brooding thought, and our fate is sealed, by ourselves, and yet in spite of ourselves. Rachel could no more have stemmed, at that moment, the impetuous tide of words,

than she could have stemmed the impetuous tide of blood that swept over her face as she spoke. She was reckless of consequences, reckless of his feelings as of her own, those deeper feelings which neither impulse nor words could touch.

“I know what your words imply—that it would have been better for me to have married Squire Treherne than Mr. Rickharts. I do not wonder at your thinking so. You misjudged me before in the same way. You could never understand, because you would not believe in me. You could not believe that you were everything to me, and your fortune and position nothing; that I hated them because they stood between us, and held you back from me. It was you who first taught me their value, when you made me feel how worthless in comparison would be anything that I might have to give. It was a hard lesson, but I have profited by it. I don't want to go back to those days. I would never again feel as I did then”—almost fiercely. “It was so

long before I could forget or cease to care. But you were engaged to be married—and papa came home—and since then I have been quite happy. I was unjust to you when, during those two first years, I said so often that you had spoilt my life. It was not so. You would have married Miss Graham. I heard that; and then I—learnt to forget.”

## CHAPTER XV.

UNCLE JOE was feeling rather ashamed of himself. Sauntering about the place, in the cool of the evening, as was his wont, his hands in his coat-tail pockets, a smile of peace and general good-will diffused over his countenance, and innocent as the babe unborn—so Mrs. Lane would have said—of any evil intent, he had, in a shady corner of the orchard, come upon a scene that had caused him to give a start, and his heart a little leap, staid and sober though it usually was, never indulging in any but the regular beat that proved him to have a good circulation, a good constitution, and a life mercifully free from emotion of every kind.

What he saw in the shadowy corner, be-

neath the old pear tree, was not much ; two figures, that of a man and woman, standing opposite each other. But it was not to-day or yesterday, or even a month ago, that his suspicions had been first aroused ; and something, a prophetic instinct perhaps, told him that the present moment was a critical one.

His intention was to make his escape, and retire unnoticed as he had come ; and, therefore, his retreat was more noisy than it could possibly have been under any other circumstances. Unfortunately, Klint was not, like his mistress, lost to all thought and consideration for the present in the bitter retrospect of the past ; but was, on the contrary, wide awake to all that was going on—to the bewildering army of midges, at which he snapped with indefatigable energy and perseverance ; to the giddy flight of an humble-bee, which came bumping down upon his nose, but, eluding the murderous snap, rose slowly and heavily out of reach, both of his sight and jaws ; to the leisurely course of a big, sober-looking beetle, whose

quiet creeping along the ground he watched, with ears brought forward, and grave intent gaze, until, as it disappeared in the long grass, he made a forward but futile spring, regretting, no doubt, when too late, the opportunity lost, in contemplation. Klint wide awake to everything, even the movements of a beetle; it was not likely that the audible mystery of those retreating footsteps would be lost upon him. He set up a deep bark, and Uncle Joe's premeditated flight was ignominiously cut off by Rachel. She alone joined him, Mr. Rickharts still standing beneath the pear tree, his head bent slightly forward, the grey eyes absent and averted, until, putting his hand mechanically into his breast-pocket, he drew therefrom a cigar, slowly and absently bit off the end, lighted it, and inserted it between his lips. The action, definite and material, roused him, filling up the blank that had fallen between him and the moment when Rachel had ceased to speak. It was the first time that he had smoked since the accident, that

being a forbidden luxury. But in more than one crisis of his life he had found tobacco not only his best solace, but also his best counsellor. He would have preferred a pipe to a cigar, but that was not at hand just then.

Meanwhile, Rachel tripped on at Uncle Joe's side, chatting and laughing, and appearing in no way put out by the untimely interruption, of which he still felt ashamed, poor old gentleman! Passing through the garden, she stopped and gathered a white rose from a certain bush. Every evening, from that same bush a rose had been gathered and worn, since the day when she first picked one to tease Uncle Joe, and stuck it defiantly in her belt.

He now groaned, as he saw her ruthlessly snap off one of the choicest and last of the blossoms. Great must have been her power, or his own want of moral courage; but when you dare not successfully oppose, what remains for you but to submit, tamely, though with a groan?



“Never mind, uncle,” said the girl, coaxingly; “it could not, anyhow, have lasted more than a day or two longer, and you can’t think how I love to wear it!”

They were just entering the house as she said this; and leaving the weak-minded old gentleman in the porch, she ran up to her own room and shut herself in. With eager impatience, as if in a violent hurry, she threw off hat and plaid, and seating herself at the open window, rested both her elbows on its sill, and thrusting her hands into the brown masses of her hair, so as to support her head, bent it forward, until the whole garden-path lay within the range of her eyes.

She must see him pass—that was clear to her, and that only; her thoughts did not go beyond the present moment. Her heart was still beating very fast, and through the fevered veins the blood went throbbing and leaping till her whole being seemed alive with sound and motion. It was a curious sensation, but hardly an unpleasant one.

Under other circumstances, had their parting in the orchard, for instance, been a more definite one—had it been like those never-to-be-forgotten partings in Treherne Park, when the man's caprice, or the girl's jealous doubts, might, as she had always felt, keep them apart for weeks, or it might be for ever—she would, perhaps, have felt something like regret or even remorse; but she was watching to see him come home, and they would now meet, as they had never met before, on equal ground. She did not regret having spoken as she had done; she would not have had one word unsaid. She felt a positive relief. It was as if some heavy debt of wrong and injustice had all at once been cancelled; as if the burden of unexpressed thoughts that she had for years carried about with her had at last fallen from her heart. She had spoken to him of herself and her feelings, as she could not and would not have spoken to any one else. Now, at last, he knew something of what she had felt and suffered. If he had hitherto

only looked upon her as a child, he had learnt to know her as a woman. If he was angry with her she could not help it; she had told him nothing but the truth—the hard, bitter truth—and she would not have him think of her as other than she was. They could now meet on neutral ground, for they were quits.

Her thoughts not venturing one step beyond the present moment, her eyes fixed immovably upon the garden path, she waited and watched.

She had to wait some time; but he did at last appear, walking slowly, which was usual with him, but with his head drooping forward, which was not usual. No doubt he was tired.

Having lost him within the shadow of the house, she sprung up. Tea would be ready almost immediately. She had still to dress, and—she wished to look her very best that evening. The wish to look well and be pleasing in the eyes of every one had always been rather a weakness of Rachel's;

but to-night there was something of passion mixed with the wish. She would wear her favourite dress—a white cashmere ; that became her, she knew, with its long soft folds, and rich white silk fringe. And her rose—it would not show on the white dress, she would wear it in her hair. She very seldom wore anything there, thinking, perhaps, as did others, that in its warm, wavy abundance it was itself ornament enough without the help of any other. But when the beautiful creamy rose was placed in it, she smiled and felt glad that both it and she looked so well.

Nothing like excitement and emotion for lighting up a dark face, and making it more beautiful and attractive than the most perfect cameo features that ever graced a statue or a brooch.

Carlton Rickharts was not in the drawing-room when she entered ; only Mr. and Mrs. Lane, who stood together like a pair of well-fed barn-door fowls, staring at each other with round, wide-open eyes, and cackling,

first one, then the other, then both together, to their hearts' content.

“Well, I'm sorry that he should go ; and if he wouldn't have minded the change of rooms—— But Colonel Beverley was here to-day, and arranged it all ; he calls for him to-morrow. And, perhaps, as Philip comes—— Not that I should have minded the extra trouble, and so I told him.”

Rachel knew perfectly of whom and of what they spoke. Mr. Rickharts would be leaving them next day. How stupid of her not to have foreseen this ! Her father's arrival would be his dismissal. She had said to herself more than once that that would be their last evening alone together. She had quite made up her mind to neglect and set him on one side for that other and elder man to whom a lifetime had already been devoted—in advance. But she had not foreseen that she was to lose him altogether ; that after that one last evening the option would no longer be hers, of smiling upon, or neglecting, him.

At the thought, her heart swelled; and as her excitement rose, so did her colour. When, therefore, Carlton Rickharts did at last make his appearance, she was, according to her wish, looking her very best; the large, intense, liquid eyes set off wonderfully by the warm crimson flush below; the glitter of the small even teeth equally set off by the feverish red of her lips whenever they parted and showed them.

But the wish to look well and be admired, was not the strongest feeling in her heart just then; and though at the tea-table she laughed and talked more than ever, it was not to show off either her teeth or dimples, but because she dared not pause to look one step either behind or before her.

Carlton Rickharts spoke very little, as usual, or rather less, perhaps, than usual, and Rachel, though she longed, more than she had ever before done, to do something for him, to wait upon him, to busy herself about him, to be nearer to him than she ever had been—on this their last evening,

could scarcely look at, much less speak to him. She made a great deal of uncle and aunt, and Klint, and even of the big Tabby who sat upon the back of her chair purring forth its acknowledgment of a caress or a tit-bit; but she had not a word or look for the one who alone filled her thoughts, without whose silent presence the room would for her have been empty. Knowing him there, she was excited to laugh and talk, and not a look or movement of his was lost upon her, though she did not once address or even turn to him. Such are the contradictions of woman, for which she is hardly, perhaps, responsible, it being her very nature.

“I will sing to him after tea,” Rachel said to herself. She had not waited upon him, as she had intended doing; she had not even given him his tea; she had made no attempt to take it from Aunt Mary, but had allowed Uncle Joe to hand it down the table, and that because it would not have been a mere act of civility, but an answer to

the passionate throbbing of her heart—a feeling altogether too intense to allow of her stretching out her hand carelessly at the right moment. “I will sing him all his favourite songs; he will like that.” She might have added, “I would do any great heroic deed at this moment, to bring him near to me!” And so, perhaps, she might; but she found it quite impossible to pass him the toast-rack.

That last evening was fated to be altogether a failure. Hardly had they risen from the tea-table when there was a ring at the bell, a confused sound of voices and steps along the passage, and the door opening, in walked Harry Barnett and one of the Misses Barnett, rather heated and out of breath, and making quite sure of a warm welcome and a pleasant gossiping evening.

Rachel turned on Carlton Rickharts the first look she had ventured upon that evening; their eyes met, and the absurdity of the *contretemps* striking her, her whole face rippled out into smiles. It was too absurd,



too provoking ! She could have wished both visitors at the Antipodes, or any other possible place of transportation, for life ; but she could only laugh.

Harry, who had never wavered in his allegiance, spite of frowns and rejection, found his way at once to her side, and kept there ; and though she did not catch the meaning of half he said, though she saw only the corner where Carlton Rickharts sat, silent and apart, she talked a good deal, and seemed highly amused and interested. Still, her thoughts went one way and her words another ; though conscious only of the one presence, it was the other she openly recognized and favoured.

Poor Harry's conversation was not brilliant, but it was such as young ladies generally approve of ; and being enthusiastically in love, there was a tacit homage in every word and look that could not, so he, at least, thought, fail to be gratifying. At times, indeed, her reception of it, and him, had been anything but gracious ; but

that evening she had only bright, soft looks and words to give. Wondrously soft her tones were, and the look in her eyes as they rose to Harry's face and lingered there ; for it was not at him she was looking, or of him she was thinking, either.

Suddenly, when the hum of gossip was at its highest, the silent figure in the corner, altogether overlooked in the general hubbub, rose and left the room.

“ And you will really go to the races with us ? What a lark ! If father lets me—and there's nothing he wouldn't do for you, I know—I'll drive you over myself in the mail phaeton, Eliza sitting behind, as chaperone. Ha, ha ! The greys are as safe as can be, or I'd never think of offering to take you. You would find it ever so much jollier than going in the waggonette with the others. Wouldn't you, now ? ”

No answer. It is doubtful whether at the moment she even realized that he was speaking.

“ You're not afraid, are you ? Why, I've

driven the old woman herself—sixteen stone and over ; so that, if she were once down, there would be little chance of her ever getting up again. You wouldn't be afraid of a tumble, would you ? ”

“ Afraid ! Oh dear, no.”

The words were flung out at him with petulant impatience. She did not mind his talking, if only he would not expect her to listen to, or answer, him. Her ears were strained to catch far different sounds, distant and vague. She was listening for the sound of footsteps overhead, or on the gravel path below the window. Where had he gone ? There was silence in the room above. She had heard the house door open. Had he gone out again into the shadowy silence of the night ? and, if so, what thoughts had he taken out with him ? She longed to know, and could think of nothing else.

“ Alas for woman's favour, and woman's caprice ! ” might poor Harry have exclaimed, for not another bright word or soft

look was he to get that evening. He tried as hard as ever to make himself agreeable, and every look and remark as suggestive as possible; but Miss Raye was no longer responsive. As he stood before her, and almost wrung off her hand at parting, by way of giving further expression to the fervour of his sentiments, she gave him a nod and wistful little smile, then turned away. But no sooner were they gone than she, too, went to the garden door, and stood there, her eyes, large and tender and tearful, straining forth into the distant shadowy depths.

“Now that the Barnetts were gone, would he not come back? Would she not see him again that evening? their last evening—their very last!”

She repeated the words twice over, and her heart sank.

Recalled to the drawing-room by the urgent voice of Aunt Mary, who never could understand the imprudence of young people exposing themselves to the per-

nicious night-dews, she sat feverishly expectant, hearing nothing that was being said, but painfully alive to every passing sound without, until the clock, or rather, every clock in the house, struck ten. Then Mrs. Lane rose.

“Will you be going to bed, dear? You must be tired after your long walk, I’m sure.”

“Never mind me, auntie. I shall be going directly; but you must not sit up.”

Of so great a self-sacrifice Aunt Mary was hardly capable. For the last thirty years she had, punctually at ten, retired to rest, and holding, as we know, religiously to established rules, which might only in very rare and exceptional cases be set aside, it was not a girl’s idle whim that would keep her out of her bed when the clocks had struck. Jane was to be trusted; she would not mind sitting up and seeing the lights safely out when the spoilt child saw fit to retire.

There was a parting injunction to the

spoilt child not to set herself and the house on fire ; and having given a rash promise, she held out the soft, hot cheek to be kissed by uncle and aunt in turn ; watched them as they slowly waddled from the room, each the substantial shadow of the other ; listened till their retreating footsteps, which were none of the lightest, died away on the landing above ; then she dropped down on the floor in the quiet corner by the window, and leant her head upon the chair where Carlton Rickharts had sat so long silent and apart.

How pleasant it was to be alone, quite alone !—no jarring sound, no discordant, broken words reaching her from afar, without tune or meaning. She did not wish to think ; indeed, she was trying very hard not to. The day had ended not quite as she had hoped and almost prayed some day of her life might end ; but regret would be worse than useless. With her own hand she had fixed the great, impassable gulf between him and her, so that even if she

would pass over to him now she could not.

“He will be gone, and papa will be here to-morrow,” she said; and though she sighed, she found comfort in the thought. With him to love and live for, there could be no regrets, no looking back.

But she could not help troublous thoughts rising up—they would come, spite of all her efforts; and tired of them and herself, she rose, then, treading softly as if afraid of disturbing the slumbering echoes of the house, in each of which lay for her a memory, or a buried hope, she went up to her own room.

Mechanically she undressed; but when robed in the white night-gown, instead of the fashionable flowing skirts, she seemed oblivious of the fact that she was there for any other purpose than that of sitting upon the edge of the bed and staring, with wistful eyes, at the opposite wall. She had quite made up her mind that, papa once back, she would not give Carlton Rickharts another

thought; but just then, when he was still so near to her, in the sanctity, too, of the little room where she had first, and that so long ago, learnt to love and dream of him, she could not keep her thoughts away from him altogether. Beyond, in the world without, in the days to come, other duties and other interests awaited her; but just then, and for the last time, so she said to herself as if in excuse, they were alone together, as utterly alone as if no other tie, no other living interest, existed in the world for either.

What an eventful day that one had been, gathering into itself, as it were, all the passions and emotions of a lifetime!—the long, lonely, vision-haunted walk; the stormy interview in the orchard, the wild excitement that had followed it; the feverish suspense and unsatisfied longings of the evening when all actual shapes and sounds had been so much less real than the shadowy ones thought conjured up. But the hours of the day were past and done



with now. It might have ended very differently; but she had no one but herself to blame: her own hand had fixed the gulf that parted them. She saw it distinctly where it yawned below; she saw where, on the other side, the man, having realized how great it was and impassable, turned, and, without one backward look, walked forward into the dim vista of the future, strong in his strength, in the noble purposes of his life. She saw, too, where, on its brink, the woman still knelt, straining forth yearning looks into the distance into which he would pass, and be lost to her; stretching forth wild, yearning arms that could never bridge over the gulf her words had placed between them.

Did she wish the words unsaid? Would she have gone back to the hour when they had sat together under the old pear tree; when his look had been upon her face; when his arm had rested upon the skirt of her dress, and his hand had touched her, unconsciously to himself, perhaps, but not

to her; for that touch it was that, thrilling her whole being, had roused in her a storm of long-forgotten passions and emotions. The passion had long since died out, and now only the feeling remained.

She was going over, word by word, all that he had said to her. It was not much. What more would he have said had she let him? Would he have asked her plainly, as he had done once before, to be his wife? She had thought so at the time, but she could never know for sure. It was not of her, but of the child Rachel, he had spoken longingly—the saucy romp who had won him by her artless looks and words, and who could never, so both had felt, come back to him, to be made miserable by his neglect or happy by his love.

Miss Raye, the fashionable young lady with a father to take pride in her, and good prospects, was a very different person to the thin, dusky-faced schoolgirl who had come, fresh from the rectory nursery and the old parish women, to be alternately the

pet and torment of Squire Treherne. But, spite of all shortcomings, he had loved her, and she had suited him ; and, Rachel, sitting on the edge of the little white bed in the quiet night, and looking, spite of the added years and importance, so childlike still in the long white night-gown, with the small, bare feet and meekly folded hands ; with the brown, beautiful hair falling about her, and the brown, troubled eyes looking back into the dim past—Rachel, who, again and again, contrasting that past with the present, had so pitied the old self standing alone and uncared for in the world, had now a feeling of envy, almost of ill-will, towards that other Rachel who, without prospects or pocket-money, with only the one cheap silk dress for best, and not a trinket to speak of, had yet been more to the man she loved than she, with all her advantages, could ever be.

“ What a pity it is that we are both so changed ! ” she sighed. Then all at once her thoughts turned to him only, and she almost

hated herself for having grieved him. He was so weak still, and weary and broken. Would he ever again be the man he had once been? and if not what would become of him? Who would there be to look after or to care for him? Would he ever, as he had longed to do that afternoon, lay the curly head on a faithful woman's lap, and feel the soft, protecting arms close about him?

Slowly her own hands dropped apart, stretched themselves out to clasp the empty air, then fell together again on her lap. Though alone, a faint colour had crept into her cheek, and her eyes, no longer staring so wistfully into the dim past, sank beneath their veiling lids. That which she had refused to Carlton Rickharts that afternoon she gave him now, in fancy—and far more. His head had found the coveted resting-place; one moment the little hands fluttered enviously over the tawny curls, touched and caressed them; then growing bolder, and stealing lower, both arms wound themselves about his neck. Could any other woman,

in thought, at least, be nearer to him than she was? Much as she had told him that day, the one thing that had been perversely withheld she told him now, and having told it, she bent her face low down over his.

She had long since put out her light, ready to get into bed. The moon had at first shone into her room and lighted it; but that had now floated out of sight, and it was in darkness that she dropped on to her knees to say her evening prayers.

## CHAPTER XVI.

It is not the way of English fathers, however they may in their hearts appreciate the good qualities and advantages of their offspring, male or female, to be betrayed into any expression of feeling on the subject. Mary's good looks, Kate's accomplishments, Martha's literary talents, Penelope's scientific bias, are regarded with provoking coolness by the impassive papa, and nothing perhaps bores him more than for them to be brought forward and made a fuss about.

Philip Raye was perfectly satisfied with his little daughter, and would not have exchanged her for any other woman living. He found her pretty and companionable, and he greatly admired her singing ; but it

is doubtful whether he had missed her much during those busy weeks devoted to business; and his greeting of her on the Didford platform was anything but emotional. He remarked that she looked well, and, to her great delight, allowed her to carry his bag, a remarkably heavy one. And as she was driving him home in the pony-carriage, very proud and happy, and resolved to make ever so much of him, he remarked, not reproachfully, but in a frigid tone of conviction, "That a fly would have been a more sensible means of conveyance on such a cold, unpleasant morning." And afterwards, by way of giving her pleasure, he informed her that he had in his portmanteau a very curious, ugly old piece of china—a toad or a lizard, or something of that kind—that he had brought for her writing-table. After that, he listened whilst she talked; for he rather liked being talked to—it amused him; and when it ceased to do that, he ceased to listen.

Mrs. Lane, who, from her childhood up-

wards, had stood somewhat in awe of the clever, reserved step-brother Philip, and who now looked up to him all the more from the fact of his having pushed his way on in the world, and made for himself both a fortune and position, had, in honour of him, given the house an extra amount of cleaning, scrubbing, and arranging, and, which was far more flattering, had even brought out all her best things—antimacassars, sofa-cushions, plate, and desert service ; so that when she bustled out into the hall on the arrival of the pony-chaise, she looked sadly heated and overcome.

It being above half a score of years since Philip had seen his sister Mary—his favourite sister, too—he allowed himself to be kissed, which he might not otherwise have done, and congratulated her upon not looking a day older than when they had parted.

Woman-like, she returned the compliment with interest, at which he smiled grimly, well aware that hard head-work and



the climate of India were not likely to make a man look younger than his years.

Breakfast awaited them in the dining-room. Mrs. Lane had had hers with Joe some hours before; but, anxious and fussy, she now trotted round the table to see that they had everything "proper and comfortable."

As Philip stood at the window, and took no further notice of her or of the younger woman either, she ventured to say, in a hushed, confidential tone—

"Well, my dear, Mr. Rickharts is off. He wouldn't wait for the colonel to fetch him, but just walked on to Treherne, and the carriage is to pick him up there."

Rachel volunteered no remark, finding it easier, under the circumstances, to keep silence.

"He was sorry to go, I think; at least, he looked—— Yes, Jane, I'm coming," as that worthy's head appeared in the doorway.

Rachel poured out the tea, glancing every

now and then at her father, who still stood at the window, thinking, not of her, or any one else in particular, but of the business that had taken him away. "If only he would take her a little more into his confidence, let her share his interests, his anxieties, his hopes, or—at least come to breakfast, and not let everything grow cold."

"That park beyond there—is it Treherne?"

So his thoughts had not been engrossed by business, after all; they had taken the direction that hers had so often taken as she stood at that same window and looked out.

"Yes," she answered indifferently; for Treherne and its park had lost for her the spell that once hung around the very thought of it.

"And the squire, Mr. Treherne, what sort of a person is he?"

"Oh, nothing particular. Short, and lame; the image of his father, so Uncle Joe says."

"Oh." And Mr. Raye's tone was now as cold and indifferent as that of his daughter.

"Does it not seem odd, papa, that living so long in the place, and visiting at Treherne as a boy, no one saw the likeness, or found out the truth about him; not even his own mother?"

"Ah."

"But Aunt Mary thinks that even if the truth had been forced upon her, she never would have owned him, or given Carlton Rickharts up; she would have died rather than lose him; she loved him better than anything else in the world."

"She was always a large-hearted, impulsive creature,"—the tone low and absent.

"Mrs. Treherne? Did you know her, papa?"

"As a girl—yes."

"Was she not very beautiful? I once saw a picture of her at Treherne. Do you remember her?"

"Yes, I remember her."

"I wonder if it is really true that she only married Mr. Treherne because he was her cousin, and she loved some one else? Aunt Mary says so."

"Says what?" sharply.

"That she was in love with some one else, an engineer, engaged in large works in the place where she lived as a girl; and that he went away and left her, and she was quite mad and broke her heart, and—married her cousin, out of pique. But I can't believe it. I can't believe that he would go away and leave her when she was so beautiful, and loved him so much. Do you, papa?"

It was not likely that the stern, middle-aged man of business would condescend to notice so very illogical and sentimental a speech; and Rachel, discouraged by his continued silence, dropped the subject, or rather, held her tongue altogether, and replenished the teapot. She dared not even tell him that breakfast was quite ready, and the kidneys getting cold.

“What could be keeping him so long at the window!”

A vision, nothing more; the vision of a woman, beautiful and passionate and imperious, whose burning kisses had fallen upon his lips, and kindled his whole being into life and longing; whose burning words had fallen upon his heart, and scorched and hardened it. He remembered the day when her lips had sought his, when her arms had clasped him, when her kisses had rained upon his hair, his brow, his eyes, his hands. And after the kisses had come words more passionate even than they—bitter self-reproaches for loving, not the man, but the working-man whose birth and position were beneath her. The kisses then given, the woman never would forget; the words that had accompanied them she would forget, no doubt, as soon as they were spoken; but the man whom she had loved, as such a woman only can love, had kept and treasured up in the heart that was prouder even than hers, the memory of both.

## CHAPTER XVII.

RACHEL, having dutifully resolved to devote herself to her father, and live for him alone, was naturally anxious that the devotion should be recognized and appreciated. It was only natural, too, perhaps, that she should feel herself somewhat aggrieved when, on the morning after his return to her, seeking him out with a view to making herself generally useful and agreeable, quite ready to walk or drive with him, sing, play, or talk to him, never doubting that she was to be the chosen companion of his days until business should again part them—she found that he had gone off by himself, without reference or message to her.

“And he did not say where he was going, and when he would be back, auntie?”

No; he had given no clue whereby he might be traced. As to time, he had said that he might be back to lunch or he might not.

Late dinner had actually been instituted at the Cottage for the time being, in honour of the respected brother, who was far too important an individual to be expected to put up with its primitive ways and dine at two.

Rachel pouted, and felt more than half inclined to cry. By way of self-consolation she fell to moralizing, and wishing that men were not what they were but something quite different. What should she do with herself all the morning? She dare not take a walk, for the object of her devotion might return sooner than was expected and call for her. Should she take Klint down to the river for his morning bath? He would miss it, poor fellow, if she did not, and they would be no time gone. But where was Klint? Nowhere to be found! Gone with his master! He dearly loved an early walk and had followed the first voice that called

him. Selfish and inconsiderate like the rest! Rachel had had many sleepless nights lately, and much secret excitement and agitation. The tears, therefore, were painfully near her eyes; and it being, so she said, her own father who had brought them there, a natural object of love and jealous exactions, she had not the same force of will to drive them away.

Listlessly she took off her hat and dropped it into the nearest chair. She did not care to go out, not even into the garden; there was not one white rose left on her favourite tree—and if there were, she would not care to gather or even look at it. She had no heart for anything; and yet she could not be idle, for then she would begin to think, and that would be worse than all.

Until quite lately it had been happiness enough to sit and think—of the many blessings that surrounded her life; to plan a pretty new dress, or dream over a new song, or look forward to the delightful tour abroad that papa had promised her in the autumn;



or to count up the invitations she had received from the many new acquaintances formed during the London season, and who, one and all, had made so much of her. But, somehow, nothing of all this gave her pleasure now! If papa would only let her be always with him! If he would make of her a friend and confidante, and let her feel that she was of use to him, that he could not do without her! But that could never be. He had done without her for so many years. He had always been a man of few words and fewer caresses, and just now she stood in such need of both, to—make up for what she had lost. With an impatient movement she tossed the pretty, fashionable hat out of the chair on to the ground, and dropped into it herself, leaning her head dejectedly down upon a table that stood near.

Would she always feel as she did now? Would the sense of the unattained, the unattainable, haunt her through life? Would she who had been so happy, who had enjoyed life so thoroughly, go on day after

day, year after year, with the dark shadow of the *something wanting* ever falling between her and the full appreciation and enjoyment of life's many blessings? How strange it would be—how dreadful! And yet she began dimly to realize that it would, that it must be so;—that papa's affection would be less to her because of that other love;—that nature, however beautiful, would make her sigh rather than laugh and shout for joy, because of the white rose she had worn in her bosom;—that music would never again be to her what it had been, because of the song that had haunted her all through the long bright summer morning. She was feeling the change already. Never before had she dreamt of questioning her father's treatment of her—the amount of affection and interest given had satisfied every desire of her heart, and filled her with childish, wondering gratitude.

“He will cease to care for me at all,” she sighed, “if I grow dull and mopy. I must brighten up before he returns.” But

even as she said so, she could not help doubting whether, after all, he would notice the change ; and then she remembered how, long ago, when she was only the child Rachel, who had so pitied herself for being alone and uncared for, there had been some one by whom her changing, wayward moods had been noticed. Once more she saw the little sulky face—for she had often felt sulky and aggrieved—lifted, by a strong, imperious hand laid under her chin, to meet a pair of grey eyes, sometimes grave, sometimes laughing, but which never failed to tell her that she was much thought of and cared for. Would it not be better, spite of all, to go back to the “long ago,” when she was only the child Rachel with her one Sunday silk, and that a black one, with no pocket-money, or trinkets, or prospects ; seeing that papa did not really care for her or care to have her with him—and that other love she had thrown away?

“Perhaps it is only business that has taken him from me, after all. Anyhow, he

must not see that I have been fretting—he must never see that so long as we two live together, let it cost me what it may ! ”

The heroic resolution inspired her with energy sufficient to rise and pick up her hat. Then she looked round. She could not turn for companionship to the piano, as she generally did, because of the song that still haunted her; or to the garden, because of the rose-tree; or to the orchard and wood, because of their memories.

“ I wish papa would leave the place to-morrow—to-day. I should like to go quite away with him somewhere; to India, or even farther still.”

This she said whilst strolling to the garden gate upon which she leant, and looked up and down the road, hoping to see her father return, her heart beating heavily with other vague hopes too, perhaps.

It being the high-road, there was plenty going on. First came a flock of sheep, throwing up far and wide a cloud of dust

that almost choked her. Then followed the Trehernes' carriage, accompanied by another cloud; after which several slow, stately waggons, loaded with sweet hay. A group of noisy children trooping home from school; ever so many detachments of woebegone, dirty tramps, at whom Rachel shook her head uncompromisingly, being just then in no soft or charitable mood.

All this she saw, and more; but not her father's return. He was not there for lunch, nor, indeed, for some hours afterwards. When he did at last appear, which was just in time for afternoon tea, which he patronized, he seemed in high good-humour, and inclined to be more communicative than was his wont.

"Well, Mary, and where do you think I have been?"

"Been? I—oh dear! I'm sure I don't know. How could I?" deprecatingly.

"Give a guess."

"A guess? Well to be sure! Perhaps, you've been—to—to—to——"

But to make a rash, reckless dash at anything, even such a trifling thing as a guess, was altogether beyond poor sister Mary.

"You have been out on business," quoth Rachel, very decidedly, and with a wise shake of the head.

Mr. Raye laughed, being well pleased with his morning's work.

"I have been down to the Treherne Works, by the river."

"Well, to be sure!" from the elder woman. No remark whatever from the other.

"I heard of them quite by chance whilst at Liverpool, and of a patent screw invented by the manager, Mr. Rickharts, which, from its description, I guessed to be the very thing at which I have been working, and over which I have puzzled my brains for the last year or more; and yet, when you come to see it, it is the simplest contrivance imaginable, and the most practical."

A pause ;—during which Mr. Raye, the well-known engineer, who had already made a fortune and a name by his one great work, rubbed his hands together softly, and smiled to himself, well pleased at the discovery he had so unexpectedly made.

“That’s just the way,” he went on presently, not, it is to be feared, with a distinct view to the edification of his lady hearers ; but rather because, having started an argument, he preferred carrying it through to the end. “That’s just the way. We spend anxious days and sleepless nights, and expend useless energy and labour over the solving of a problem, that we are at last almost inclined to give up as beyond us ; whilst another man sees in it no problem, but a simple fact, a natural conclusion, arrived at naturally, and requiring no labour and very little thought ; only a clear head and good common sense. Rickharts’ patent might, for simplicity, have been invented by a

child; and yet the greatest mathematical genius could not have solved the difficulty more completely. There is the making of a first-rate practical engineer in the fellow if only he would give his mind to it. That is the kind of man we want; one who would never start a plan that he could not carry out. And so I told him."

"You saw Mr. Rickharts?"

The question had risen with a tumultuous rush of thought from the heart of the one woman, and passed quietly out of the lips of the other.

"Fortunately, he came in for an hour to see how things were getting on. I had quite forgotten his accident, and overlooked the possibility of not finding him there."

"Well, it's a wonder, and a merciful interposition of Providence, that he ever got back. I never expected him, I'm sure, to leave this house but in his coffin."

"Really,"—absently, with lifted brows, and gently stroking the short, full, iron-grey beard. It was not as the man, or rather as



the suffering fellow-creature, that Carlton Rickharts had awakened an interest in Rachel's father, but as the practical inventor of the—screw.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

“ARE you going out again, papa?”

Breakfast being over, Mr. Raye had left the room, and Rachel following him, saw him take down his hat and turn to the house door.

“Only on business, my dear?”

“May I come with you?”

She did not feel at all sure of being wanted. Had he cared for her companionship, he would have asked for it. But her foolish dread of another long, lonely morning overcame every scruple, and her voice was so eager and pleading, as were also the great brown eyes, that Mr. Raye was moved to look round at her, and even to smile at her childish eagerness. It was like

having the little Rachel back again, who out in India had alternately teased and amused him by her exactions.

“ I’m only going somewhere on business. But you may come with me if you please.”

“ Oh, thank you ! ” so gratefully. “ I won’t be at all in the way, and—I won’t be a minute getting my hat and gloves.”

She was half-way up the stairs already, and quite breathless.

They had a long, pleasant walk ; and there could be little fear of any one suspecting that she was fretting secretly, when she looked as bright and was as merry as during those morning hours. “ He won’t care for me a bit if I get dull ; and when he goes to India he won’t even take me with him.” Such reflections, joined to the fact of its being more natural to Rachel Raye to look bright than dull, to laugh than cry, kept her up, and made her do her very best to reconcile poor papa to the infliction of having such a very ignorant, unmathematical, uncongenial companion at his side.

It was a long walk they took ; through Treherne Park, by the village school and school-house, which Rachel pointed out as the squire's old home ; through the village, and then across fields down to the river. She had only once before been as far. Past the row of prim, stiff, model cottages, well-built, solid, and rather cheerless-looking ; with square little gardens surrounded by a wall, and all exactly the same, from one end to the other.

Not having the bump of order and symmetry largely developed, they looked to her very cold, and rather dreadful ; nor was she at all sure that, as a workman, she would not prefer living in a thatched cottage, with an odd-shaped, irregular piece of garden around it. But, then, she knew nothing about drainage, or the fatal effects of damp, and an impure atmosphere. Beyond the row stood, equally square and cheerless-looking as the rest, but detached, and of a more pretentious appearance, a

cottage, to which Mr. Raye pointed with his stick as they passed it by.

“Mr. Rickharts’ house. Not quite such a grand place as Treherne—eh?” With the complacent smile, that somehow rises quite naturally when another man’s reverses are under discussion.

“*That* Carlton Rickharts’ house? Ah, yes! And there was the unsightly building, with the high, narrow chimneys. Could they——”

“I forgot to mention that my business is with Mr. Rickharts.” A critical look at her dress as he added, “Petticoats are rather in the way in such places; but you can manage, I suppose?”

She could not manage to keep the colour from her face, or to keep her heart from beating far too violently to allow of a coherent answer. “Her father had business with Carlton Rickharts, and she had offered to accompany him. How would he meet her—he who had not cared to have one word or look at parting!”

Entering the great building, they were shown into an office, at either end of which stood a table and large leathern chair ; and this, with an extra chair or two, constituted the sole furniture of the room, with the exception, indeed, of two shelves that ran round it, the lower filled with books, while on the other stood several rough models, on which Mr. Raye turned critical but not disapproving glances.

At the table nearest the door, sat an elderly, emaciated figure, with very little hair made the most of, and a pair of painfully bright spectacles. Rising at once, it made a deep obeisance, first to the gentleman, then to the lady.

“ Mr. Rickharts was in one of the shops ; he would probably not return to the office that day. Should he be sent for ? ”

Poor Mr. Mayne was in a state of strong nervous agitation. He knew that Mr. Rickharts resented nothing more than being sent for ; and though sincerely attached to the manager, he stood rather in awe of him,

since his illness more especially ; for there was a pale sternness about his features, and chill reserve in his manner, that had been noticed by others as well as the faithful clerk.

“He may be engaged,” came the welcome answer. “I could go to him, I suppose?”—in the easy, decided tone of one who feels that, professionally at least, his presence must be welcomed everywhere, and that his notice of a junior must be esteemed an honour.

The clerk gave a start of relief, and hastily depositing his pen behind his ear, bowed them to the door. “He would accompany them himself.”

The two men walked on together, and Rachel, for the moment quite overlooked and forgotten, followed.

They passed through two shops, where there was a great deal going on, ever so many machines at work together, and a deafening din. Several wild-looking, soot-begrimed faces looked up as they passed, and

stared, not at the great engineer of whom they had never heard, but at the pretty, graceful woman's figure. For there were few men, wild or civilized, who could look upon Rachel Raye without admiration, however much the women might find to say against her.

For herself she felt like one in a dream, walking through weird and unknown regions; and nothing came before her as real until a certain figure separated itself from among a group of workers at the further end of the hall, and advanced towards them. Then she knew that Carlton Rickharts had joined them; that he was shaking hands with her father, and had acknowledged her presence by a bow as cold and formal as could have been given to any casual acquaintance. So much she saw, but no more, not having cared to raise her eyes to a level with his face—not, at least, until the clerk, finding himself no longer wanted, respectfully vanished, and the two remaining men walked on together,



evidently too much absorbed, the one listening, the other talking, to pay much heed to her.

“ It was strange and exciting to have the two men, who alone made up her life and filled her thoughts, thus thrown together, sharing the same interests, and walking together as friends. It had been one of the apparently impossible day-dreams of the ‘long ago,’ when her lover, Carlton Treherne, had been everything, and she and hers nothing. Now the case was reversed: it was for her father to patronize, if he would, Carlton Rickharts, the manager. It was a grand thing to be proud of one’s father, and to glory in his success; but, on the other hand—— ”

She looked up at the two men as they talked together, and a wayward thought arose in her mind. Had her mother when she married Philip Raye, who had neither name, nor fortune, nor position of which she could be proud, looked forward to the time when he would have all three? Or

had she not, rather, loved and been proud of him for himself? Had the beautiful Katherine Treherne loved the cold-hearted engineer for anything but just for what she saw to admire in him as the man? She had been prouder of him than of the husband whose ancestry dated back to the time of the Saxon Heptarchy; and prouder afterwards of the peasant-born changeling, than she ever would have been of her own son, who yet, in his deepest poverty and degradation, had found a woman to love and be proud of him too. Rachel was reasoning out the mystery of love. The two men, having reached the door of the last shop, stood talking together some minutes longer. Rachel might watch them with impunity—they were evidently altogether unmindful of her presence.

Looking from one to the other, she was struck by a strong likeness between them. They were of the same height, had the same erect carriage, the same straight, symmetrical limbs, the same massive pon-

derousness of countenance, though more defined in the younger than in the elder man. On both was stamped the impress of individual power: no one looking at either could doubt that he was strong, morally as well as physically. They were both grand, stately-looking creatures; but theirs was not the dignity of birth or associations. They had no one but their Creator to thank for the majestic impress of nobility with which He had invested them. They might well have been father and son; so Rachel thought at least. And then—how easily could she have devoted her life to both, and how much suffering and vain longing would have been spared her!

“Well, I’ll see you again in a day or two; and should I be suddenly summoned up to London, you will hear from me.”

Carlton Rickharts’ face was wearing its rare, pleasant smile. There must have been something in the interview to call it up. He shook hands with Mr. Raye, and then with Rachel, in quite an easy, matter-of-fact

way, as if there had never been anything between them, painful or otherwise. During the first part of the walk home it was Mr. Raye who did all the talking, and Rachel who listened—or was supposed to listen. When they had passed the model row, and had reached the foot of the hill, Rachel stopped.

“If we were to go across the cemetery and the park on the other side, we should cut off ever so much. Uncle Joe took me that way.”

Mr. Raye had no objection to the cemetery; so they crossed it.

On the further side, where it touched a distant corner of Treherne Park, the trees of which overhung and shadowed it, there rose a high, white marble cross that caught Philip Raye’s eye. Rachel had seen it before. “That is Mrs. Treherne’s grave,” noticing his looks.

“Mrs. Treherne buried in a cemetery?”

“Yes. Is it not strange?” speaking softly; for she had not forgotten, and never would

forget, the beautiful face in the picture, and the haunting blue eyes. "She had such a horror of being buried in the family vault among all the other Trehernes, though her husband lies there, that she left it in her will that she was to be buried in the cemetery in quite a simple grave; and her son—Mr. Rickharts, I mean—chose this spot, because just on the other side of those trees was his favourite corner of the park, and you can see the white cross quite plainly through the branches. Perhaps that is why he had it made of white marble, and so high. Papa, doesn't it seem as if she felt that some day, as mistress of Treherne, she would be parted from him, and she wished to assure him, when the time came, that nothing could ever really part them; that, living or dead, she belonged more to him than to any one else? It must be a great comfort to him now to have her there. Don't you think so?"

He did not answer her; and looking up into his face, and seeing it absent and pre-

occupied, she dropped the subject, and both relapsed into silence.

On reaching the Cottage, they found a telegram summoning Mr. Raye back to London, on pressing business.

It was with business that his last thoughts were filled that day, that is certain; but it is equally certain that in a dream that night he went back to the village cemetery—to the distant corner shadowed by the park trees, where the high, white cross stood apart, and threw its long, dark shadow, as if in protection, over many an humbler mound which had no monument of its own; even as Katherine Treherne had in her lifetime extended her protection to the many, in memory, it may be, of the one. Over the figure of Philip Raye the shadow of the cross fell, and covered it, as he knelt on the grass, wet with the night-dews, and cried out, with something of the old passion that had once been in his heart, and which it had required all the stern will and endurance of the man to get rid of—

"Katherine, I have come back to you. Through the lapse of years—through the dim vista of forgotten or buried memories—across the Great Gulf that death has fixed between us—across its eternal silence—my beautiful, my imperious, my lost but faithful love, I have come back to you at last!"

## CHAPTER XIX.

ANOTHER London season was over, had been over some time, quite long enough, at least, for many, who had built upon it their every hope, who had made of it their life, and never dreamt of looking a day beyond, to have forgotten it.

It had been rather a gay season, and its results what might be confidently expected: a good match or two made up, and, on the sly, a bad one or two also, no doubt—for love is blind, and so are designing mammas sometimes; a few broken hearts that would require a course of judicious treatment at some fashionable watering-place, or German Bad to heal; one breach of promise of marriage, and a couple of divorce suits.



The last ball of the season having been given, the last speech of the session made, the fashionable world had gone elsewhere in search of excitement. Very light was now the sprinkling of carriages in the park on an afternoon, and of equestrians on a morning. Some few there were still ; and one particular riding-party might have been seen oftener than any other, and would hardly have escaped notice, forming as it did quite a cavalcade.

First of all, there was a stout, smiling woman, who would have been called handsome had she weighed a stone or two less. Beside her rode a figure not less capacious, but certainly less pleasing, who bore the history of his career on his countenance—the best years of a life spent in India, the climate of which had not agreed with him. Tearing madly along in front, on three absurdly small ponies, were three absurdly small children, dressed rather fancifully, with flowing, flaxen curls, boys and girl alike ; and riding in a very independent

manner, now behind, now in advance, now beside the elders, was a young lady with very large eyes, a small dusky face lighted up by a brilliant colour every now and then, and a row of white, childish even teeth that had a trick of showing themselves off upon all possible occasions.

The stout lady and gouty gentleman were General and Mrs. Fenwick; the children were theirs, of course; the young lady whom they had much pleasure and pride in chaperoning was Miss Raye, with whose father the general had been intimate in India.

The last ball of the season having been given, the last speech made, the park being deserted by fashionable equipages and having fallen under the vulgar patronage of cabs, Mr. Raye awoke one day to the fact, and advised his daughter to accept one of the many cordial invitations she was constantly receiving; more especially from widows, and families where the daughters were many and single, and not so very

young. But instead of being gratified at her father's thought for her, Rachel was quite hurt at the proposition.

"And you, papa," she asked reproachfully, "you would not go with me, would you?"

"I, my dear? Well, not just at present, I have business to attend to."

"Then, of course, she would not leave London, and him. Why should she?"

"Why? Because it was hot and dusty, and unfashionable, and dull for her, he should fancy."

She did not see it in that light, however, and told him, with a great earnestness in her eyes and voice, "That it would be dreadful to have to go away and leave him, even for a few weeks."

"And what will you do if I have to go out again to India?" he laughed, patting her cheek and thinking her rather silly.

"I shall go with you,"—with the saucy look and toss of the head that he found far more attractive than all the sentiment she lavishly wasted upon him.

So the subject dropped at the time, but was renewed a week or so later.

"My dear," he began once more, when, dinner being over, they were left together at the close of an unusually hot day, "Mrs. Penrose says that London at this time of the year is very unhealthy."

Mrs. Penrose was a most captivating and warm-hearted widow, who had taken a violent fancy to Rachel, and was always pouncing upon Mr. Raye at odd times, and in very odd places, to talk to him about his "charming daughter."

"Bother Mrs. Penrose!" Rachel had almost said—indeed, she did say it to herself, most heartily.

"She told me this afternoon that she would not be here now had she not been tempted by circumstances to prolong her stay beyond the usual time. She goes to Scarborough next week, and wishes very much to take you with her. She spoke of my running up from Saturday till Monday, and perhaps I could manage that once in a way."

"I hate Scarborough, and I don't like Mrs. Penrose."


Philip Raye shrugged his shoulders. He did not himself particularly fancy the widow, and would be very glad to get rid of her, even at the sacrifice of his little daughter's company at breakfast and dinner time.

"London is very hot just now, as she says."

"I like the heat. I mean to stay on through it all, and prepare myself for an Indian summer," with a mischievous laugh.

"A quite unnecessary ordeal, my dear."

Then Mr. Raye leant back in his chair, straightened himself, stroked his beard, smiled, and put on altogether the look of a man with whom things prosper, as he told Rachel that it was no longer necessary that he should go out to India. He had found a substitute who would finish the work out there as well, if not better, than himself, and this would leave him free to embark in a far more considerable undertaking at



home. He did not enter more fully on the subject—indeed, he half apologized for having said so much, by adding—

“I thought you would be glad to hear that I had given up all idea of again going out to India.”

And Rachel was glad, though she would not have owned it, even to herself. She had got into a habit of repeating to herself that India was a very jolly place, that there were capital balls there, and the riding was splendid, and the voyage out would be great fun! As to distance, and the memories that must be left behind—— Well, she could not help her thoughts straying back when she tried so hard to urge them forward. She would have them under better control by-and-by. But she was young, and England not so very large, and she could not help thinking sometimes that if she and Carlton Rickharts were to meet——

Mr. Raye saw the little face smile and dimple all over, and knew that the girl was as well pleased as he was himself to stay in

the old country, though, for his sake, she would have put half a hemisphere between it and her.

His head yet more erect, his smile yet more complacent, he went on to say that, being now settled in England, he proposed taking a house in London. He had seen one in Belgrave Square that would, he thought, suit him.

Philip Raye, having at last made a fortune, after years of hard and unremitting toil, persevered in not with any definite hope of pecuniary advantage, but for love and zeal of the work itself; having scraped and hoarded, and then lavished his all upon a work that might have proved his ruin instead of the making of him, was just the man to enjoy to the full his hard-won prosperity. There would be no ostentatious display—he was far above that; but there would be a certain solid, sober grandeur about all his surroundings that would be far more impressive. Very massive would be his plate; first-rate the contents of his

cellar; and the few pictures, in which capital had been invested, such as would make the mouth of a connoisseur water. There must in everything he owned be soundness and intrinsic worth. He did not pride himself upon being a man of taste—for vanity was a weakness altogether unknown to him—but he thought he should like to furnish and arrange a house to suit his individual taste; and that being quite an amateur sort of thing, very different from the serious discussion of business, he condescended to make a confidante of Rachel, who proved a most eager and interested listener. It did seem a thing most wonderful and almost passing belief that she should become the mistress of a well-appointed home, and drive as pretty a carriage, and ride as fine a horse as any girl in London—for so her father, proud of her horsemanship, laughingly declared she should.

Hitherto she had been more than satisfied with the small, furnished house, taken for a



year; and the showy little mare hired by the month.

Riding was now the one excitement she could still enjoy to the full. When mounted, and then only, she found it quite easy to forget; and she took nothing away with her but the dainty, gold-tipped whip papa had bought her when in Paris, and her own high, animal spirits.

Lately, too, a fresh interest had been added to the natural enjoyment of the rides in the park and elsewhere. At her very last ball she had come across Sir Ralph Randal once more.

Standing against the door-post, languid and bored, he had caught the sound of a clear, fresh laugh, and looking over a sea of heads, had also caught the flash of a pair of brown eyes, and the wreathed smiles of a pair of very saucy lips; and before the laugh had quite died out or the lips closed, he was at Miss Raye's side, and, figuratively speaking at least, at her feet.

Very eagerly he recalled himself to her

remembrance, not taking it in any way for granted that she remembered him, as he had done her, at once. "But the Didford ball—she could not have quite forgotten that? He had not—no, by Jove! The jolliest valse he had ever had in his life. Had she not one, just one, to spare him that evening?" very earnestly.

Referring to her card, she declared she had not; but there are those, belonging to the lesser, or perhaps younger, order of manhood, who may be cheated, and have their claims set aside with impunity. She contrived to give him two vales, and his only regret when they were over, and hers, too, it must be owned, was that he had not been there sooner to get ever so many more.

"The jolliest dance I have had since I danced with you last," he cried enthusiastically.

And she laughed up in his face and nodded, as she said, "It was rather a pity that there was not to be another ball."

"Well, you see," less enthusiastically,

“it’s awfully hot, isn’t it? and half London is already gone—all my people are, at any rate. But it’s a horrid ‘shame that you went away when all the jolliest balls were going on.”

Hearing that Miss Raye would be riding in the park at a certain hour next day, he found himself there, on horseback too, at that particular hour; and they got on even more swimmingly in the open air than they had done in the crowded ball-room.

She was quite delighted with his open, unreserved way of dealing with men and things; whatever came into his head he spoke it out with a hearty straightforwardness that was altogether reckless of consequences, but could never give offence. She did not even mind when he opened fire on the subject of Carlton Rickharts, waxing hot and wrathful, not with any one in particular, but more particularly with fate for having cheated such a splendid fellow out of his due. One thing he could not understand, nor could any other sensible indi-

vidual, why the man, just because he had changed his name, should insist upon dropping all his old friends. Did it not stand to reason that, now he had no preserves and all that sort of thing of his own, he should be all the more willing to join him, Ralph Randal, for a month's grouse-shooting in the Highlands; run down with him to his uncle's for a week's pheasant-shooting; and do something in the way of fox-hunting at his own little place in Leicestershire, where he could have it all his own way, and as good a mount as any man need wish for? He had seen Carlton Rickharts lately, and was full of him, which added an especial charm to the pleasure Rachel found in his society. They had only had the one ride together then, for he was off to join some friends at a German Bad. But he very soon satisfied himself that the German Bad and the English friends were bores; and one fine morning, when he should have been drinking the waters and making himself agreeable to Lady C——, who looked to

him for amusement and a flirtation, he found himself riding once more beside Rachel in Hyde Park, roundly declaring that he was jolly glad to be back, for those foreign places were the slowest things going.

There were many pleasant meetings after that, and merry laughs, and famous rides—not in the park only, for he voted that “slow,” and had a perfect genius for delightful, practical suggestions.

At the end of a fortnight, Rachel felt just as if he were her brother, or at least a cousin, whom she had known all her life. Moreover, she had quite made up her mind that he was nicer, almost, than any one she had ever known; incomparably nicer than Henry Barnett, and ever so much nicer than Charlie Wilkinson, who was so conceited, and thought so much of himself—and had never known Carlton Rickharts.

Sir Ralph had also, on his side, made up his mind, not to look upon her as a sister or cousin, for he had half a score of female

cousins, and found them all, collectively and separately, a nuisance. But having made up his mind to something else, he suddenly announced his intention of running up to Leicestershire for a week or so. "He must go home," he said significantly.

"Must you? Why—for the shooting?"

"Partridge-shooting in August! That is rich!"

"Ah, no, to be sure. I quite forgot. But why must you go? It will be so dull here without you."

He devoutly hoped it would; and in gratitude for the soft little speech, he threw out sundry dark, mysterious hints. But hints were not at all in his line, and he was too honourable to speak out plainly until he felt he had the right to do so. Rachel, therefore, remained in happy ignorance of his intentions, which were these:—To go home and tell his mother, who acted the dowager at his little place in Leicestershire, and kept up the *prestige* of the family, that, having made up his mind to marry Miss

Raye, he would be glad of her advice. She could raise no objections. The girl was as good a match as any going; the father held a very good position, and had made a fortune; and the girl herself rode and danced to perfection—and what more could husband or mother desire?

It may be doubted whether Rachel's cause would have prospered, had it been left altogether in his hands; but it so happened that Lady Randal had a particular friend who had also been the particular friend of Philip Raye when out in India, and thought a great deal both of him and his daughter, whom she had even invited up to their old castle in Scotland. This circumstance, joined to the mother's natural wish that her son should marry money, made her receive his communication most graciously.

That being comfortably and speedily settled, the son shortened his intended visit by some days, and started, not for London, but for Scotland, where the shooting had

begun. But the birds were wild and scarce, and the gamekeeper a *muff*, and the weather abominable; so he returned to London.

Rachel welcomed him with her brightest smiles. She had missed him, as she knew she would; his cheery companionship had done her good, and she was grateful to him for having made some things, even life itself, so much easier to bear.



## CHAPTER XX.

**All things** must come to an end; and if we would **but** await that end with patience or philosophical trust, how much better would it be for us.

Rachel's protracted stay in London, which had been rather hot and tiresome, was drawing to a sudden close; but so, too, were the pleasant rides to which she had learnt to look forward.

After being kept in town so much beyond the proper fashionable time, Mr. Raye had suddenly announced to her that, certain business arrangements having been satisfactorily settled, he was ready to accept his old friend Colonel Malcolm's invitation, and to start for Scotland as soon as she could

get herself and trunks ready. (It was Mrs. Malcolm who had impressed Lady Randal so favourably with the daughter-in-law that was to be.)

Rachel thought it would be delightful to go to Scotland with papa. He enjoyed nothing so well as a week's good shooting; and he could be so different, so pleasant and so gay, when he had not that horrid business to bother him and make him grave. But, on the other hand, she did feel rather sorry when, after a delicious ride to Richmond, where Sir Ralph, who had only returned the day before, had taken them—for she never went out without the whole Fenwick party—she broke an unusually long silence by remarking regretfully, that “that must be their last ride, as she and papa started next day for Scotland.”

They had chatted so merrily all the way there, and more than half the way back, that she had almost forgotten the fact of her departure; but when the pause came, she remembered it. Silence very seldom

fell between those two ; but the truth was, that Sir Ralph, though perfectly clear as to what he had to say, and must say that day before they parted, was not so clear as to the manner in which it should be said, and now felt quite provoked with himself for having, amid all their careless talk, overlooked the important result to which it should have all been made to tend. Here, however, was an opening, and he seized it eagerly.

“Ah, well, if you are leaving town, so shall I, of course. I would not be here a day after you. But we have still half an hour to be together, and we may as well make the most of it.”

He did make the most of it, and sent Rachel home quite confused and bewildered, hardly knowing whether to be more glad or sorry, more flattered or pained. Her reasonings, or rather the thoughts that went rushing pell-mell through her mind, were these—

“He is such a dear good fellow, and I

like him so much. He is always in good humour, and doesn't mind anything. As a brother or cousin he would have done so well. What a pity it is that men, more especially such a nice fellow as he is, should not see it in that light, and be glad to remain friends; but should always wish for something more. If I tell him that I can never marry him, nor any one else, he will cease to care for me, and I shall cease to see him, and—lose my last hope of meeting his friend Carlton Rickharts."

That Sir Ralph did care for her just as much as he said he did, neither more nor less, she believed. After that first great shock, when all her feelings had undergone a revolution, she had, in very bitterness of soul, and to revenge the past, taken to cynicism, and learnt to distrust men, their actions and words; but it had never occurred to her to distrust Sir Ralph. How could she look into the honest blue eyes and do so! She was sure that he was very fond of her, and that she could do anything

with him, or make anything of him if she chose to exert her power ; and this very consciousness it was that made their relative positions all the more embarrassing.

As she entered the drawing-room, her father, who was standing at the window, turned sharply round ; but though he had something to say, and was in a hurry, he did not say it at once, but stopped short, and looked at her as she stood before him, her habit gathered up in her hand, her cheek flushed, her eyes moist and sparkling.

“Certainly she is a pretty girl !” was his pleased mental exclamation. He had often been surprised at the admiration and interest she excited, more especially among young men, and widows who hunted him out, and would nail him for an hour at a time while praising her ; but never before perhaps, had he been so forcibly struck by her good looks. Yes ; her eyes were fine, and she had a graceful figure and a wonderful complexion, and looked remarkably well in her habit.

“ Oh, papa, how nice ! I did not expect you home for ever so long this last evening.”

“ My dear, I only came home to tell you that I dine out, and shall probably be away the rest of the evening.”

Her face betrayed every emotion, and it told him that he had disappointed her.

“ Business, my dear. Mr. Rickharts starts for India to-morrow, as my substitute, you know, and I have to give him certain parting instructions. He dines with me at the club.”

He had turned to go, had even reached the door and opened it.

“ Papa.”

She still stood where he had left her, her back towards him. What mad impulse had urged her to cry out ; was urging her on to throw herself on her father's breast, at his feet, no matter where, so that she and her prayer could reach him ? “ Oh, papa ! don't let him go—don't send him away. I have loved him for years, I shall love him all my life. It has been the hope of seeing him

again that has kept me up and made me glad. Don't part us. I can't live without him—without the hope of him ! ”

“ Well, my dear ? ” with the least shade of impatience, for he was in a hurry.

“ Will you wish Mr. Rickharts good-bye—from me ? I did not know that he was going.”

“ Did you not ? ” briskly. “ Well, it was arranged rather suddenly just at the last.”

Her face still turned away from him, she heard the door closing.

“ Papa.”

“ Eh ? ”—the impatience in the tone more perceptible.

“ Is he glad to go ? ”

“ Well, I suppose so. I should like to see the young man who would not be glad of such an offer. And there is not another to whom it would have been made.”

A pause on his side, a silence on hers, for the space of a heart-throb, then she heard the door close finally. He was gone, and she was left alone. She would be alone for

the remainder of the evening; and a dreary echo at her heart said—alone for the remainder of her life. No wild hope, no sweet surprise, no rapturous dream would come to disturb it. A few more hours, and he would be gone past recall—gone as if she had never loved him, never nursed him, and kissed him back to life, and herself lived ever since, in the hope of seeing him again. The street door banged to. Very slowly she moved forwards until she stood in the window—stood and watched her father cross the road, and turn down the opposite row of houses, every step he took seeming to place an immeasurable distance between her and happiness. But he was soon out of sight; and she turned away, feeling as those feel who, from behind the lowered blind, watch the coffin being carried out, and hear the funeral procession move off, and know that the something which, up to the last moment, was love—though it lay there so cold and lifeless—has passed away beyond recall; and that when the



blinds are raised, and the summer sunlight streams in once more, and the world goes on as usual, the one whose heart was buried in the coffin with the dead, will be for evermore alone.

“Oh!” she cried out sharply, and aloud, and raising both hands to her face as if struck by sudden physical pain.

## CHAPTER XXI.

At the moment Philip Raye reached his club—in good health and spirits, never doubting for a moment that his *protégé's* fine Indian appointment could be otherwise than satisfactory to all parties concerned—his little daughter, the only being in the world he had to love, and whose happiness must, therefore, have lain very near to his heart, lay all along the ground, broken-hearted and despairing, in his own private room at home—the room where so much serious business had been transacted, and so many vast schemes worked out, in part at least; but which seemed about the last place to which a woman would creep in her sorrow. For

Rachel, however, it had been the only possible place. Visitors might disturb her in the drawing-room, a smart maid invade the sanctity of her bedroom; but no one ever dared enter the master's room, more especially when he was absent. She would be safe there, and alone. Its privacy gained, she had fallen to the ground, her arms stretched out before her, her face pressed down upon them.

The attitude had, in moments of grief, been a favourite one of her childhood, when all her passions had been wild and stormy, and far less under her control than they had learnt to be of late. It had come quite naturally to the child to fling herself down, and spend the first vehemence of emotion in sobs and tears. Would the woman's grief so spend itself—the grief that seemed almost more than she could bear?

“Oh, my love!” she cried over and over again. “Oh, my love—my darling! You cared for me; and twice you told me so,

and I would not hear. It was not that I did not love you. God knows it was not that. He knows it so well; but you would not believe in my love—and I could not tell you. I could not make you see it. I wanted to reach you through my words; and they were only bitter, and drove you from me. And all the time I loved you—oh, how I loved you! But I shall never see you again. I shall never look into your face, or hear your voice, or feel your eyes upon me. I shall never again thrill at the touch of your hand, and you will never again ask me for the kiss I seemed to grudge you—never, never!”

Then wild sobs, the silence of exhaustion, and again the old despairing cry—

“Oh, if I could but see you once more, before you go! If I could but hear you say that you are glad to go—that you will never regret having known me; never miss me out of your life as I shall miss you; never long, as you once did, to have my arms about your neck—to feel your head

drawn to my bosom—to know how great a woman's love can be when it is believed in! But you are going, and I shall never see you again—never!”

Had there been any one near to comfort her, she might have been reminded that India is not the nameless land from which there is no return; but it is doubtful whether at that moment she would have received the comfort. It was not so much the actual distance at which she looked, with eyes so despairing, as that impassable gulf which her own hands had fixed, and which no word of hers could now bridge over. They had once been lovers, and they were now parting, for ever, as strangers. He was leaving her without even a last good-bye. And why should they ever meet again? Once before a man and woman had parted in the same manner. She had been left behind, and he had gone his way—perhaps to die, where her love could not reach him—perhaps to forget her, and marry some one else. She, too,

had married, but she had never forgotten, Rachel felt quite sure of that; she had loved him to the end, loved him still, perhaps, though she lay beneath the shadow of the high, white cross, and the memory of their lives as connected with each other had almost passed away.

How often had Rachel before felt a certain connection between their lives! It was the old story over again—passion on the one side, at any rate—a misunderstanding, separation, and afterwards, long years apart, and death!

Rachel had ceased to sob or cry aloud. She still lay along the ground, but without sound or emotion now. Tears would not bring him back, or cries either, and every other feeling was merged in the one intense longing to look again into the man's face, and feel him near to her, if only for a moment. There is no reasoning against such feelings. He had misunderstood her, and often made her more miserable, as, in her jealous pain, she had once told him, than

any other could ever have power to do. His love had never satisfied her, because of the passionate strength of her own. He had even been unfaithful to her, and, but for circumstances, would have married the woman of whom she had always been so jealous. The very circumstances, too, that had broken off the engagement, had been a shock to her. But what was all this compared with the one great longing to see him again! He was not an ideal lover, he was not a fine gentleman; he was her father's *protégé*, the gamekeeper's son—but she loved him.

Once only, from the moment she had thrown herself along the ground, had she lifted her head, and her hands too, wringing them together; then down they had dropped again, and her face upon them. It seemed to her so impossible to look up; to face the light of day, and the mockery of familiar objects, when in a few hours he would be gone, without even a last good-bye.

Utter silence had fallen on the room, for

it lay apart, at the back of the house, so that the many jarring sounds of the busy London streets—so busy even out of the season—could not enter to disturb it. The very air seemed weighted with the vast schemes and mighty projects that, conceived and worked out amid the pulseless silence of thought, had been, or would some day be, sent forth to the world.

Every now and then, turning from all other thoughts to the one, Rachel would moan out, "Oh, if I could but see him! If I could but see him—once, only once before he goes." But it was to herself only she spoke, and her voice no longer disturbed the silence that lay around her.

In due time Philip Raye, in good health and spirits, and his mind as full of business, quite as full of business as Rachel's was of love, reached his club and inquired for Mr. Rickharts. He was not there. "It is as I feared," he muttered, referring to his watch. "I am a quarter of an hour late myself. He would have been here, had he under-



stood me. I must have named the wrong hour after all. A quarter to six ; he won't be here till half-past." And Mr. Raye stroked his beard and wondered what he should do with the long interval.

It was a matter of some consideration to the great man what he should do with the one hour of his life ; but he would have smiled with indulgent pity had he been told that his daughter Rachel, who was only for him the pretty, bright, careless child, whose life was all sunshine and laughter, and balls and trinkets, and who could not possibly have a thought beyond the hour, was wondering drearily how she could dispose, not of one hour of her life, but of that life itself—wondering whether God would take pity on her and give her strength, not only to bear, but to make the best of it, though she could not kneel just then and ask Him for it.

The door had opened quietly, and had as quietly been closed. Some one had come in—a servant, perhaps, and seeing her

lying there, had retired. Rachel sprang up—her hands still clasped; the pretty curly hair all in disorder; her cheek on fire with shame and emotion; her eyes large, and solemn, and heavy with the weight of tears, shed and unshed,—and stood face to face with Carlton Rickharts.

There had, as Philip Raye had suspected, been a mistake about the time, a later hour having, in truth, been named; but as he had also said that he should be at home all the afternoon, Carlton Rickharts had hoped, by calling at an earlier hour, to get the interview over, and so have the remainder of the evening to himself. Not finding Mr. Raye at home, he had gone to his room to write a note, in case he should return home before going to the club. He had opened the door and closed it behind him without noticing the prostrate figure at the further end, and it was not until Rachel started up and confronted him that he became aware of her presence.

The shock was all the greater, as he had

understood from her father, a remark of his having been misunderstood, that she had left town more than a week before.

As she now confronted him, and unclasping with an effort her trembling hand pushed back from her eyes the hair that had fallen over them, fixing them upon his face with a long, mute gaze, he turned very pale, and in his confusion—for the woman's look had upset him—again laid his hand upon the door to go.

She did not move, she could not; but she stretched out to him her arms.

“Don't go. Oh, stop!”

## CHAPTER XXII.

“I did not know you were going to India. Papa did not tell me until this evening.”

He had turned at the first sound of her voice, and now looked at her. During all their acquaintance, as he had often enough said, half provoked, both mentally and to the girl herself, he had never yet seen her the same two minutes together. But to see her as she appeared before him now, was like a sudden and startling revelation—in the long straight habit, with its heavy folds lying about her, with the loose hair falling about her face, the burning cheek, and the usually shy, mischievous brown eyes fastened on his face with that strange, mesmeric look. He felt himself turning pale,

and wondered what could be the subtle influence that mastered him.

"I was so sorry not to say good-bye."

The look was not that of a child, but the voice was, with the plaintive ring in it that had often before struck him, and, spite of her petulance and waywardness, had drawn his heart to her.

A long silence followed the words, then she added still more softly—

"I am so glad you have come." And she gave a great sigh, and came nearer to him, where he still stood by the door, his hand upon it.

She was so glad—oh, so glad! She longed for him to speak to her, to hear the sound of his voice; but she felt that even if he were to turn and leave her without a word, her tears would not be so bitter, her despair so great—her whole life would be so much less hard to bear now that she had looked into his face, though only for a moment.

She did not put out her hand to him as she would have done to any one else; but

now that he was there, a little smile, faint and tremulous, as if longing to break out but needing encouragement, played over her lips. Then, suddenly, she woke to the fact that not only was she looking at him, but that he was looking at her. He was very pale, and his features were sternly set, but there was in the grey eyes the look that, when first seen, had so startled her, filling her life with all strange feelings and emotions, and giving her to him body and soul ; though she had not recognized this at the time, and had often wondered in her childish impatience why she so thrilled at the man's presence, and what could be the meaning of the influence he had over her. Had that last hour, that last look, made it all clear to her ?

Very slowly her gaze dropped from below his. As slowly the faint smile passed out of her face, leaving it hushed and sad. Her lips quivered, and the tears, that after the first burst of grief had been so much too bitter to shed, now came welling up, filled

her eyes and rolled heavily down her cheek. She put up her hand to wipe them off, but with a sudden, passionate gesture covered with it her face.

The clock on the mantel-piece struck the hour; but time and place had ceased to exist for both. She thought only of him, and he saw only her. The past was with them both, indeed, at that moment; but not the future—that was forgotten.

“ Rachel ! ”

She started, her hands dropped from before her face, she gave him one wild look, then, with a low cry, sprang towards him. She had believed him lost to her; she had seen him, as she thought, pass out of her life for ever. And there he was; and he had called to her once more, and the outstretched arms had closed about her.

There were a few low, broken words; but it was she only who spoke. He was silent. Then she hid her face against his breast and pressed herself up closer to him, and held him fast.

"I thought I should never see you again."  
This after another long pause.

"And that made you unhappy?" gravely asked, and quietly.

She looked up, and he read the answer in her eyes.

"But I shall mind nothing now. Oh, how good God has been to me!"

"I thought it would be as well for both that we should not meet again." But as he spoke he lifted up her face, as he had so often done before, and looked into it.

Who would ever again be to him what she was?—the dark-browed woman with the passionate eyes, the little sallow face, now all flushed and aglow; the warm, shadowy glances, deep, and melancholy too, as is all that is born of passion; and the soft, tremulous lips, wreathed with smiles.

"Will you kiss me *now*, Rachel?"

He had not forgotten the past, nor had she.

She had moved back a step; but now she came quite close, and leant both hands



against him, and tried to raise her face to a level with his, that she might give the kisses he had asked for but would not stoop to take.

He did at last stoop down his lips to hers—and oh, how happy their contact made her, and how fully she realized that she had, indeed, given herself to him, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, until death!

“Oh, how I love you!” she murmured, scarce conscious that she spoke aloud; for she was faint with the excess of joy, that seemed so much the greater for all that she had gone through.

“Why did you not tell me so before? You would have spared us both so much.”

There was a ring of sternness in the words; but the man had been made to suffer, and, as he now felt, needlessly.

“You have put many years and half a world between us.”

She nestled closer, but smiled up in his face. What was that compared with the

great gulf that she had believed to be for ever fixed between them? That was at least bridged over; and across that bridge, the memory of their love and that last hour, would pass prayers and blessings, and daily, hourly thoughts.

“You will finish papa’s work, and then you will come back to me; the time will not seem so long.”

But now that he knew she loved him, blindly and devotedly, as women love, he had pity on her. Long years of weary watching for what might never come—  
anxiety, suspense, doubts, suspicions, and over all, the silence that must be kept. He saw farther than she did, and had pity on her.

“You will find it very hard, dear.” And he took the little face between both his hands, and drew it close, and softly kissed the eyes that would, he knew, shed so many bitter tears before he came back to her; if, indeed, he ever did come back.

“I shall find nothing hard,” she whis-

pered, "now that you have come back to me and kissed me, and believe that I love you."

"You think so," with an incredulous smile; "but you do not know what it is to wait."

"Yes I do," reproachfully. Had she not waited for him, in the silence of thought at least, for years—waiting, listening for the sound of his voice, the distant echo of his footstep? How little he understood her, even now!

"India is a long way off, and the years pass so slowly when you are waiting."

"I will tell papa——"

"You must tell your father nothing," with some return of the old roughness of tone. "If you care for me, you must be true to me, and wait till I return. I am not in a position to speak to Mr. Raye, more especially at such a moment when I am acting for him. He must know nothing of this till I return. I must wait, and so must you."

She did not answer him—she could not. She felt that he was right ; but India was, as he had said, so far, and the long years, without him, would go so slowly, and she would not hear from him, or have the comfort of his love.

“ Perhaps it would have been better, after all, if we had not met again ; if I had gone my way, and allowed you to go yours. You will find it very hard to wait, to waste the best years of your life ; and then throw away every other chance for that of my return. Before long you may regret that—— ”

But she would not let him continue. She lifted one of her soft little fingers to his mouth, and smiled up at him, and shook her head ; and then, because she felt so much like giving way, and would not, thinking it would grieve him, she drew the hand she had all along been holding, to her lips, and kissed it until the troublesome tears had been got rid of ; then she brought it down to her bosom, and held it there very closely, whilst she said—

"I shall not find it hard to be true to you, and I shall never regret that you came back to me. I will tell papa nothing until you return from India."

"And if I never return?"

It was cruel of him to speak so, but she could bear even that thought now.

"If—you don't come back to me, then I shall tell papa, and I will be true to you still until I die."

"Are you quite sure, Rachel?"

"Quite sure."

She dropped her head slowly back against his arm. Her eyes sought his, and looked into them, and in that look lay the vow recorded, sure and irrevocable. He believed in her love at last.

Mr. Raye, having spent the one extra hour in his life most satisfactorily to himself, was just leaving an old curiosity shop—he had a weakness for old curiosity shops—and, watch in hand, was saying, "I must be returning to the club. He is always punctual, and so is dinner," at the moment

when Carlton Rickharts, who had been enjoying nearly an hour's interview with Rachel, rose to go.

After those first solemn words, they had talked together quite cheerfully, and she to him quite merrily. She had laughed and dimpled and pouted, and been even saucy and mischievous and provoking, quite as in the old days when she had been the child Rachel, and he, the big, strong, bearded man before her, so grand and awe-inspiring a personage, except, indeed, when her spirits got the better of her admiration, and he ceased to be anything but the lover whose natural fate it was to be adored and teased.

They had talked of the future, and gone back over the past, and she had clearly proved, to her own satisfaction at least, that, leaving that behind, there was nothing in it that he could possibly regret. Strong in the sense of individual power, what was there he could not achieve? And if he was to be great, would it not be a thing much greater and nobler and better to be great as Carlton

Rickharts, than as the master of Treherne. He would be M.P., and Prime Minister too, perhaps, if—only God would spare him to come back to her.

He did not see it all quite as she did. The past had been outlived and laid on one side, but it had left its mark on him, as any fierce trial will. But when she added, dropping her voice and her lashes too, and blushing very hotly, as she twined about one of his big fingers her own soft little ones—

“And if you had kept Treherne, you would have lost me, and only got Miss Graham instead, whom you never really cared for, I know, and who was so cold and selfish, and did not love you a bit.”

Carlton Rickharts could not but own that the exchange of the fair, cold, faithless woman for that other woman who loved him, was worth something, as she said.

“I was so sorry at first,” she went on, under difficulties, for he was laughing at her, and hugged her close, “and so angry that you

should have lost all. It seemed so cruel, so unjust at the time," touching lightly upon the subject that had not before been mentioned between them, and would not even then, but that it was their last hour together. "And now I can but thank God that it gave you back to me. Everything else seems so little in comparison, fortune and position, and so many other things that you must have valued and been sorry to lose. I know you can't feel as I do," with some of her old impetuosity; and as he no longer held her, she drew herself away, and went and sat apart, but near to him still, her hands clasped on her lap, her whole frame bent towards him, her eyes fixed upon his face, taking their last look; "but don't grudge me my happiness. In losing all, you gave me all. Don't grudge yourself to me. You would not if you knew how I loved you!"

These were almost her last words to him, for the time was up, and he rose to go. But having reached the door, he paused, as he



had done once before that evening, and turned to her.

"Come to me, Rachel. Put your arms round my neck and kiss me for the last time."

The words were so low as to be almost inaudible, but she heard and understood them fully. The same longing was upon him as had been upon her for years. She went to him and put her arms, warm and soft and passionate, about him, pressing him to her closer and closer; and she kissed him with a long, lingering kiss, for she felt how entirely she belonged to him. He felt it too, and was satisfied. With a feeling at his heart such as he had not known for years, such as he had never, perhaps, known before, he released her, and went his way.

## CONCLUSION.

IN conclusion, I would record two facts for the benefit of those who may be interested in Squire Treherne. In general, the interest he excited was very great, both in his own county and in the fashionable and aristocratic circle to which he belonged. There was a general tendency to regard him in the light of a hero, or, at the very least, a man singularly gifted, which, no doubt, he was, though his talents had for years lain unrecognized, and never would have been recognized in the false position where he and they had been so out of place. He would find it a thing much less hard to be a good speaker, or writer, or poet, than he had found it to be, with all his learning, a good village schoolmaster.

The first event to be recorded was the birth of a son and heir. For the fourth time (for another little one had been born and buried in Italy during that first tour of theirs abroad) Agatha held a child to her bosom, and blessed God. It was but a small, weakly thing, and, in its babyhood at least, not much to look at; but as the London physician, sent for in all haste, pronounced it perfectly sound and healthy, and the London nurse fell into raptures over it, as a "perfect beauty," we may hope that, with all its many advantages, and the love and care with which it will be surrounded, it may live to grow up and continue the long and noble line of Trehernes.

Agatha's feelings on the occasion were such as scarcely to be described. The baby was hers and his, and the heir of the old name and the beautiful old property. She would bring it up to be like its father, to be worthy of him and of its high position.

And as from the open window she heard

the shouts of the tenantry, on the evening of its christening, and caught the light of the great bonfire that had been set blazing in its honour, and saw the flags flying, and thrilled to the sound of rejoicing, the rejoicing of the many over the one, her little one!—she felt afraid in the midst of her joy; and it was only on her knees, the meek head bent low over her sleeping child, that she dared to feel altogether glad and look forward in simple, loving faith to the future.

The second event that marked the year—for Agatha, at any rate—was that, at her earnest intreaty, though with some shyness and reluctance on his part, John Treherne did at last consent to sit for his portrait, which was taken by the most eminent artist of the day.

The artist, being a man of discernment, and quick to seize upon every effective point in a subject, was at once struck by the perfect beauty and symmetry of the squire's hand, which had a trick of showing

itself off, by rising, with a languid motion, to the pale forehead, as if the man were weary, or in pain.

“He is proud of his hand,” decided the eminent artist, well pleased. “I must put it prominently forward in his portrait.” And he did so, and thereby gratified, not John Treherne himself, but the little wife, who pronounced it altogether a *chef-d’œuvre*, and gravely demanded of the eminent artist what exact point of a baby’s existence might be deemed most propitious for the successful taking of its portrait? To which anxious inquiry the artist, no doubt, responded with all due consideration for the mother’s feelings—and his own credit.

The squire’s portrait having been painted, it went up to London, in company with the eminent artist himself, to be framed; and then, at the earnest entreaty of the artist who was proud of it and looked upon it as a master-piece, it was exhibited in the Royal Academy, where it attracted much notice and interest from the romantic history

attached to the original. But even among those who knew nothing of that history, there were many who were attracted by the face itself—the fair, pale, spiritual face with the dreamy, far-gazing eyes and the aureole of bright, red-tinged hair.

When the season was over, the portrait returned to Tréherne, and took its place in the picture-gallery among the rest. It was hung up very near to that of the late squire, the proud father who had so often seen, but never recognized, his son. One portrait only divides them, that of his mother.

Yes, Katherine Tréherne has at last found her rightful place among those to whom she rightfully belonged. She hangs between her husband and son, not looking at either, but staring straight before her with blue, solemn eyes. A very handsome face it is; so much handsomer than any other in the collection, and so different from them, too. But the warm, shadowy look and the wonderful smile that, once seen by Rachel Raye, haunted her ever afterwards, are not

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there. For the picture that hangs in the gallery is not the original, but a copy made by the afore-mentioned eminent artist, and though form and feature and colouring are there, he failed to catch the mysterious subtlety of expression that lies in feeling alone, perhaps because he had not known the woman nor her history.

The original portrait that used to hang in the study, having been copied, was consigned to a chest, labelled, and set aside. For, on taking it down from the wall where it had hung ever since Mrs. Treherne had herself put it there so many years before, her son had read its history traced by her own hand at the back. It had been painted, not for the gallery, but for her son Carlton, in token of her love, to be near him wherever he was, and remind him of that love—always.

The squire, being a man of honour and sentiment, had at once decided that it should be as she had desired.

"It was painted for him, and he must have it," he said to Agatha that same evening. I shall get it copied, and then put it aside. I shall write and tell him what I have done, and then offer to send it out to him, or to keep it until he returns to claim it."

Would he ever return to claim it?

To how few of us is it granted to see the day-dream of a life fulfilled! How much oftener does it chance, as the man himself had said, that we wait and watch for what will never come! Rachel is waiting and watching, but she is praying too; and our future, that of one and all of us, lies in the hand of God.

Will Carlton Rickharts come back to claim her and Katherine Treherne's picture, the one thing left to him of the past? Will it hang where her hand would have placed it, where his eyes might always rest upon it, and, by a caprice of fate, those of that other man whom she had so loved; keeping solemn



watch over them in death, as she had not been allowed to do in life—*together*; looking down on them with the light of a changeless love in the blue eyes, its changeless smile on the warm, full lips.

THE END.



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